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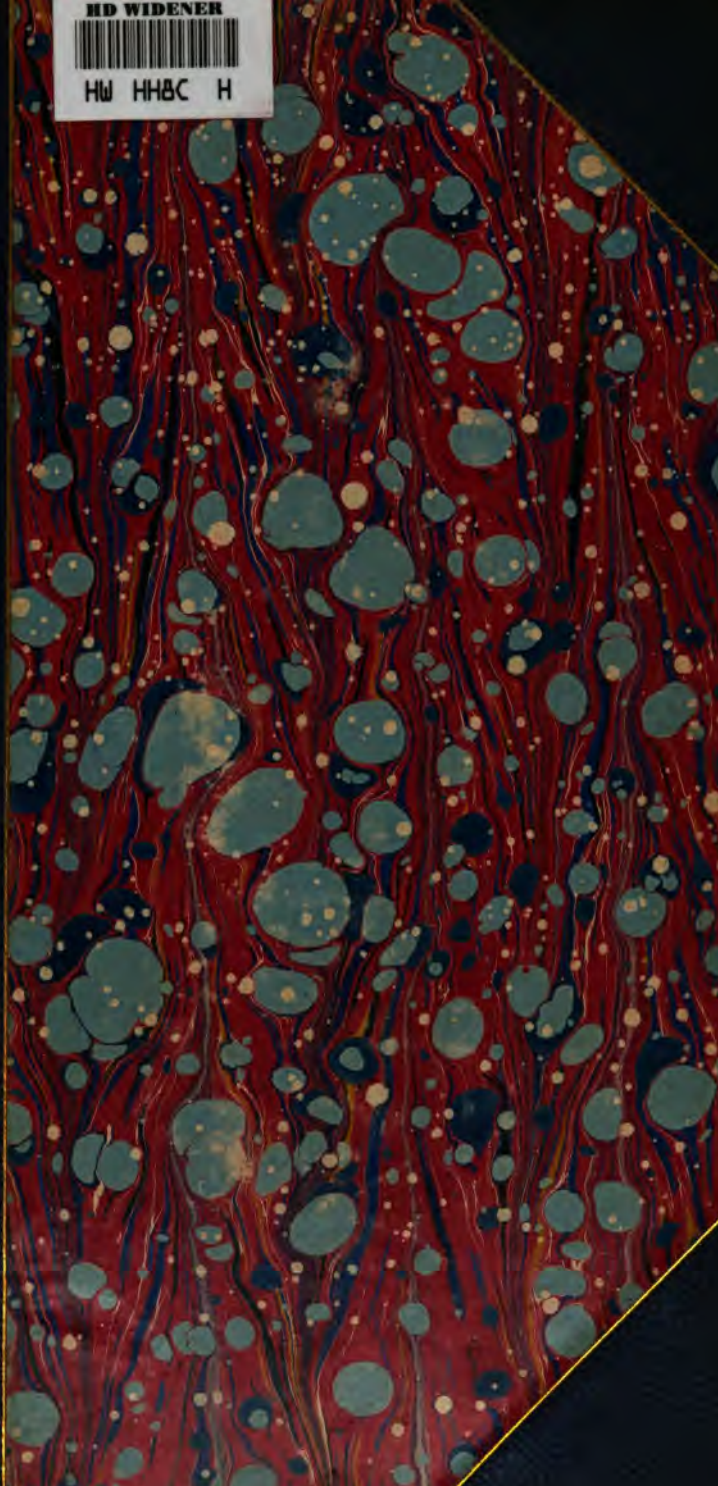
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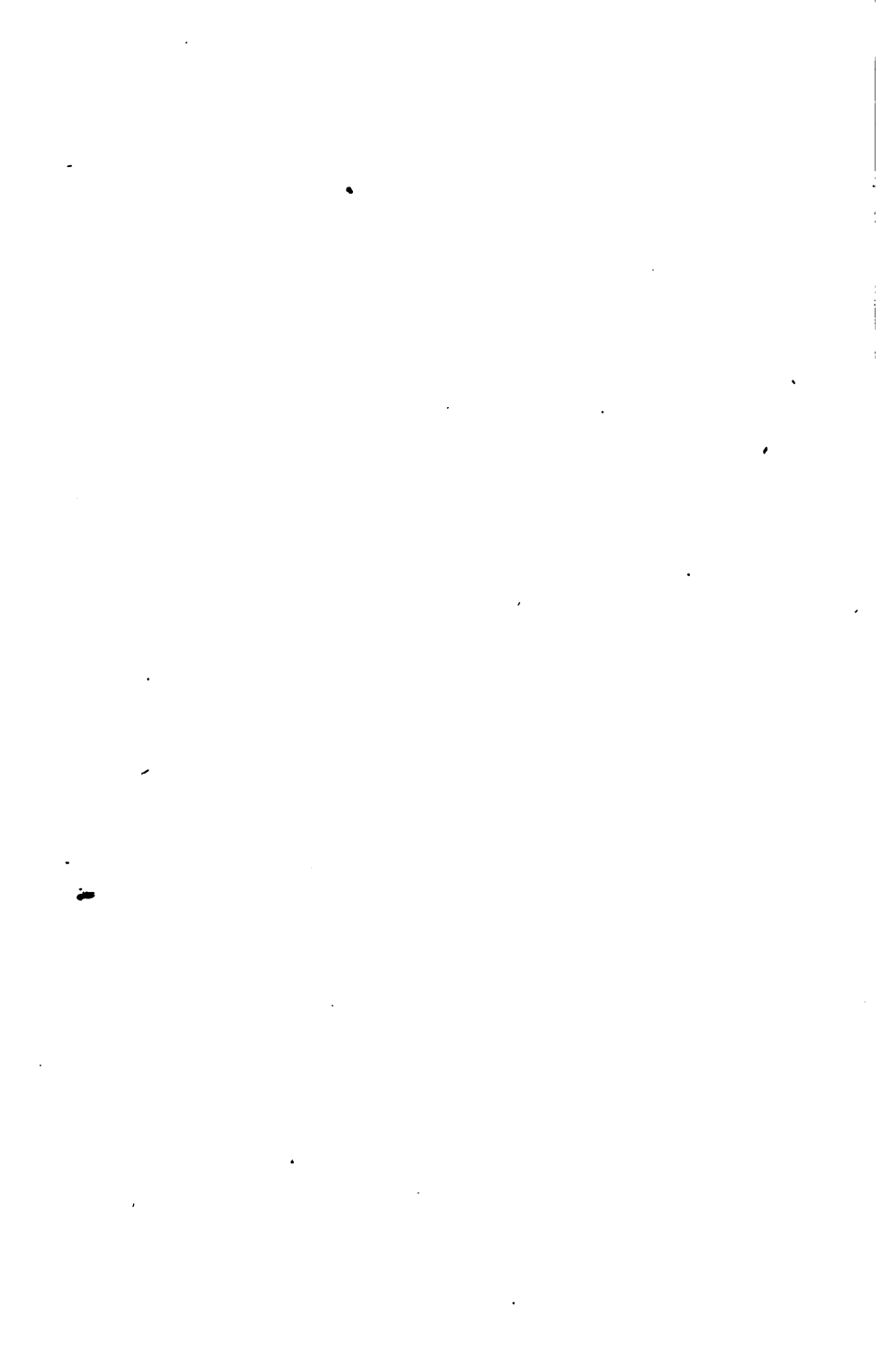
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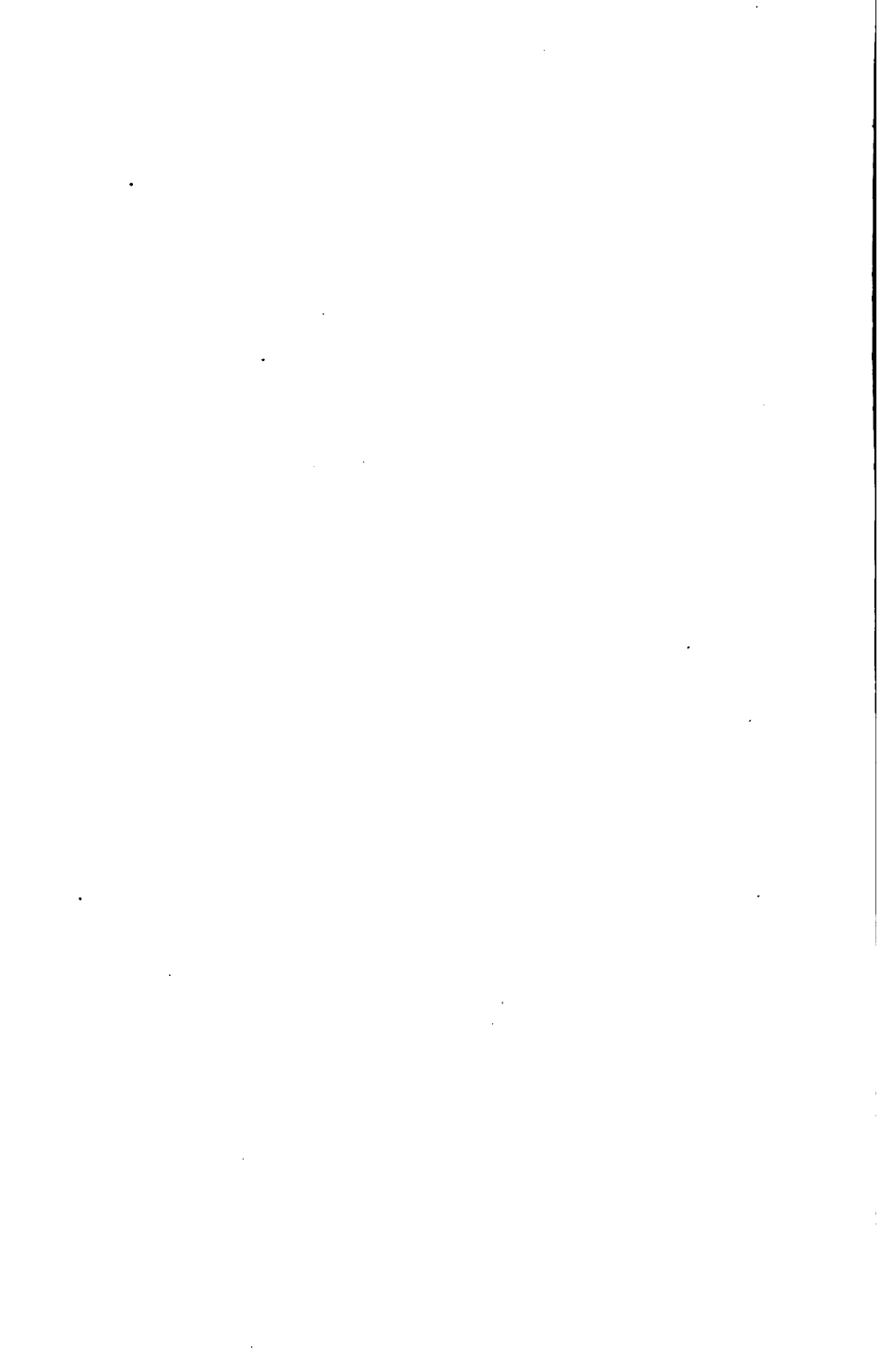














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Edward Marston

"I will the country see —

Where old simplicity,

Though hid in grey,

Doth look more gay

Than foppery in plush and scarlet clad."

T. RANDOLPH.



LONDON

SAMPSON LOW, MARSTON, SEARLE, AND RIVINGTON

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TO MY GRANDCHILDREN KATHLEEN
AND PATRICK.



DEDICATE this booklet to you, my little Kathleen, because you have been very good to your grandmother and to me ; and to you, little Patrick, because you are the unconscious hero who attacked a whole regiment of hornets with your wooden paddle, and came off victorious, without a thought of the terrible odds against you. I unite your two names on this leaf, because you have aided me, while writing those which follow, to bear a great sorrow with faith and hope.

E. M.

*London,
August, 1887.*





INTRODUCTORY NOTE.



I is well, though perhaps not necessary, to mention that many of the following letters were written for "The Fishing Gazette." I have been tempted, perhaps rashly, to bring them together here, and once more to appear before the critics and readers who have hitherto welcomed my slight and imperfect sketches with warmth and generosity, for which I gladly take this opportunity of most cordially thanking them.

In writing, arranging, and revising them I have found some pleasure and much relief from pressing anxiety, which for many months has been ever present with me.

E. M.



A word as to the title, "Fresh Woods and Pastures New." I think it well to say that I had thought of three other, and, as it seemed to me, more appropriate ones; but after diligent inquiry I found they already exist as book-titles—the last selected was "Fresh Fields," with which I had nearly gone to press when I discovered that Mr. Burroughs had already adopted it in a charming little book (Houghton, Boston—Douglas, Edin.), with which I should be sorry to come into collision. I have now fallen back upon the exact words from the last line of "Lycidas," about which the question of copyright can hardly arise; nevertheless, I trust I have not been anticipated in using as a title this well-known though often misquoted line.

E. M.



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A WEEK AT A FARMHOUSE.

LETTER No. I. [1886.

"Here, at least, I'll stay no longer—let me seek for some abode.

Deep in some provincial country far from rail or turnpike road ;|

There to break all links of habit, and to find a secret charm In the mysteries of manuring and the produce of a farm."

BROMLEY DAVENPORT, *Lowesby Hall*.



HERE shall I spend my holiday?

It is now just two years since I performed those piscatorial exploits in pleasant Dove Dale, which I ventured to record in a small volume entitled "An Amateur Angler's Days in Dove Dale." Last year my destiny carried me across the Atlantic to "Frank's Rancho" in the Rocky Mountains. All the long months which have intervened have been spent in the usual mill—months long enough and weary enough to make me forget the disasters that befell me

in my angling experiences, but far too short to make me forget the delightful time I passed in that charming Dale. Those pleasant recollections have only served to inspire me, as time rolls on, with new and ardent enthusiasm for further adventures with rod and line. Let others, I say, wander off to Alps or Apennines; they change their sky but not their minds who cross the sea; they may come back laden with artistic lore from all the galleries of the Continent, or they may, and usually do, come back as empty as they went. As for me, I prefer to spend my rare and precious holiday "far removed from noise and smoke" in some quiet, sequestered spot in my own country. Whither shall I go?

One of the small dreams of my old age has been to go down to Herefordshire for the purpose of staying at an old farmhouse and fishing in one or other of the prolific streams that percolate that fertile and leafy county. My recollection of these streams goes back to boyish days, fifty years ago and more.

I indulged my fancy by picturing my delight in thus revisiting scenes with which my boyhood was so familiar—now for the first time, when age has whitened what remains

of my hair, and my former ability to spring over a five-barred gate no longer exists.

"Nought cared this body for wind and weather,
When youth and I were in it together!"

There may be something of a melancholy as well as a charming side to this picture—

"A neighb'ring wood born with himself he sees,
And loves his old contemporary trees."

The melancholy side would be the remembrance of what I was when I first knew these trees and that old farmhouse, and those with whom I had known them—

"This fond attachment to the well-known place
Whence first we started into life's long race,
Maintains its hold with such unfailing sway,
We feel it even in age and at our latest day."

I am becoming sentimental; the contemplation of a holiday should make one grow glad rather than sad. My object in going to that old farmhouse was not to brood over the days that are past, or to recall the "old familiar faces" that now mostly sleep in the old churchyard, but to go a-fishing in "The Teme," or "The Arrow," or "The Lugg."

One's boyish remembrances of the most pleasant times are most vivid; and it is pleasant to forget the disagreeable ones.

Well do I remember many a delightful ramble by the side of the sometimes slow and sometimes swift-flowing Lugg. I know it is the custom of some writers to depreciate the attractions of this stream—it has been called sluggish and unpicturesque; in my opinion, there is nothing so ugly about it as its name, and I know of many bits of quiet woodland scenery on its banks as picturesque as can be met with on almost any other stream, where on a genial summer's evening I have watched the big trout flopping up here and there, and it seemed to be all one to the trout whether he took a bait provided by bountiful Nature, or a tinselled hook obscured by artful man; he was equally happy whether he was caught or not caught—either fortune was but a part of Arcadian bliss. The trees were alive with a variety of song-birds; on the thistle-heads, especially down about The Tarrs, one might see dozens of the pretty little golden linnet, so rarely met elsewhere; rabbits hopped across one's path; the lowing herd wound slowly homewards to the milking yard, or flapped their dappled sides in a cool and shady corner of the river.

That is the sort of thing which a treacherous memory led me to look for now with too much certainty. Not that such scenes of

felicity did not exist then, or do not now ; but things are not always in this happy state, and I am sorry to be obliged to record that my present visit has by no means realized my dream. Romance has given way to reality ; the weather has been dead against me. I came down here with the intention of blessing those charming scenes and streams ; but I cannot do it—my week's experiences do not justify a benediction.

I took train at Slough on Monday morning, and travelled *via* Gloucester and Hereford. I wanted to see how Herefordshire looks now that it is ploughed up by railways in every direction. In my time no railway had dared to approach it. Then old Dick Morris used to drive a slow-and-sure four-horse coach from Hereford to Leominster and back, over Dinmore Hill. Dick was a real specimen of a coachman, and weighed twenty-five stone. Now the train cuts through Dinmore Hill, and one only catches glimpses of the surrounding country as it dashes along.

The weather had been fine and genial until I left the train at Kingsland to take a ten-mile drive across country to the old farmhouse which was to be my headquarters for a week. As we approached the hills in whose midst this pleasant old homestead

nestles, storm-clouds lowered over them, distant thunder was heard, and we reached the friendly shelter of the farm in a down-pour.

The rain was not only plentiful, it was cold, coming as it did off a biting north wind. It was pleasant to meet with a warm and genial welcome from my friends.

On Tuesday I started at ten o'clock for my nearest stream, the Teme. I was well equipped with tackle and flies of the best, and accompanied by a youth who had driven me to the water—about four miles from the house. The weather was extremely unpleasant, speaking mildly. Heavy black clouds hung round, and "shadows like the wings of death were out upon the gale," which blew in cold and chilling blasts from the north, frequently bringing angry showers with it.

I began at Leintwardine bridge, on the north side of the river, with the north wind blowing at my back. I wore a thick black mackintosh, with overalls to match. The stream, in spite of the rain, was low; I whipped it carefully, throwing, as I thought, very artistically into all the likely currents, whirls, eddies, and pools as I struggled along. By four o'clock I had reached Walford bridge, and then I vowed I would fish no more. I

had had six hours of hard toil, for I conscientiously left no part of the water uncovered by my doughty flies ; but with the exception of three small grayling, which I caught, I never saw a single rise during the whole time !

“What can be the meaning of it ?” I asked myself. What could any angler have done that I have not done ? I did my best to keep well out of sight, and, having the wind with me, I threw with the utmost delicacy and precision ; perhaps it was a general disadvantage that I had the higher or banky side of the water, and could not so well get at the deep holes, which mostly trended under the banks on my side.

I fished up-stream and down-stream, as circumstances seemed to dictate ; sometimes I fished with a dry fly, deftly laying him on the water, floating proudly with wings spread out and jaunty tail : nothing could be more like nature. Sometimes I allowed the flies to sink, and float down a few inches below the surface, thinking that, as it was too cold for the fish to come up, they might be feeding on a plentiful supply underneath ; but it was all to no purpose ! I will go home now, and try again to-morrow. I may say that, during my fishing, notwithstanding the cold wind, I

had become very warm, and had for some time, when the rain ceased, fished without my mackintosh. When I got into the trap to return home I began to feel the biting wind again—my feet were wet, of course ; and that night I went to bed with a chill and fit of shivering.

On Wednesday morning I was too ill to fish, and, truth to say, not very enthusiastic about it ; so, instead, I strolled round the farm with mine host. He is a breeder of pedigree Hereford cattle, and possesses a herd of over a hundred animals as fine as one might wish to see. I was shown four two-year-old cows and their bull-calves, which, on Saturday morning next, will be on the broad Atlantic (in charge of my host's son), on their way to found a colony of pure-bred Herefords in South America. Let us hope that his unusual pluck and enterprise may not result in disappointment.

It seems that the United States, which until lately was such a fine market for pedigree Herefords, is now virtually closed. The Americans have their own Herd-book, and unless imported Herefords are entered therein, they are tabooed, in spite of any genealogical claims they may advance in their own country.

Herefords are no longer wanted in the States, and as there is no import duty on breeding cattle, the acute Yankees have resorted to exacting a charge of twenty per cent. of the value for the privilege of entering pedigree Herefords in this Herd-book, and without that record American farmers will not buy.

Hence it is that our farmer is now seeking "fresh woods and pastures new" for his beautiful cattle, and I trust he will find them.

In the evening I felt better, and the old mania revived. I remembered that my instructor had supplied me with a large black fly for evening fishing, with special directions as to mode of using him on the stream. Armed with this and full of hope, we drove off again to the Teme at six o'clock. This time we commenced at Walford bridge, where we had yesterday left off, and I fished for about two miles up stream under circumstances as disappointing as before. No longer am I permitted to doubt that it is *luck*, and not skill, which fills the basket.

I plied that big black fly with unremitting care and close attention to rules laid down. I placed him jauntily on the water, and succulently I drew him under it ; but he had no attraction for trout or grayling—not a single

rise did I get or see the whole of that cold, damp evening. I have no doubt whatever that the river swarms with fish. Pray don't let me disparage the river ; but I want to know why I cannot, or rather why I do not, catch them ?

And yet how easy a thing it would have been for me to have told you of the "spotted beauties" that weighed down my creel ; of the fights I had with a pound trout in yonder swirl, and a still larger grayling in the running stream. What a week of sport I might have recorded ; but I refrain. I leave that kind of interesting verisimilitude to more experienced writers—to anglers who know how to do it.





LETTER No. II. [1886.



N Thursday, notwithstanding the haziness of the early morning, I started for the Shobdon Water, accompanied by my young friend Christy. We had a drive of over nine miles in a drizzle of cold rain.

The Shobdon Water embraces that portion of the river Lugg which passes through the estate of Lord Bateman from above Aymestry to Mortimer's Cross, and another portion some three or four miles down the river between Kingsland and Leominster, called "The Wegnalls." This latter portion I had not an opportunity of visiting; but I hope to do so on a future occasion.

It may be that I am prejudiced in favour of the quaint old river Lugg; but I can recall no more beautiful bit of meadow and sylvan scenery than that through which it runs from above the village of Aymestry down to Mortimer's Cross, and thence through the rich and

pleasant meadows of the Croft Castle Estate, past the wooded banks and copses of the Tarrs, onwards, leaving the pleasant village of Kingsland to the right.

On reaching "The Wegnalls" the river loses much of its beauty. Here it certainly becomes sluggish and unpicturesque ; but here, also, in certain seasons, is to be found some of its best trout-fishing. Of this extenuating circumstance I have, however, no present experience.

The meadows on the south of the river, below Mortimer's Cross, have a celebrity of their own. On these fields a bloody battle once did rage, in the Wars of the Roses, between the forces of Edward, Duke of York, and Henry of Lancaster, in which the Lancastrians were severely defeated. This battle was fought February 2, 1461, and proved to be the turning-point in the tide in favour of the young Duke of York, who was shortly afterwards proclaimed king under the title of Edward IV.

A brief account of the battle is recorded on a handsome monument which stands in the turnpike road at the entrance of the village of Kingsland. The inhabitants are proud of this monument. I have not seen it for many, many years. It used to be kept

well painted and in excellent order, and doubtless is still faithfully preserved as a lasting record of a famous battle.

I began fishing just above the old bridge at Mortimer's Cross, and I fished up to Aymestry. It rained some of the time, and all the time it was wet and sloppy in the long grass of the aftermath, and of the meadows still unmown. We reached Aymestry wet-footed and tired, but not a fish had we seen—not a single rise afforded us any encouragement. This, however, did not much matter, for is it not pleasure enough for a smoke-dried Londoner to ramble along that lovely vale of Aymestry, even in wet and windy weather?

Here the Lugg lingers through its pleasantest scenes, winding its way amongst hazel and alder bushes, underneath the Pokehouse Wood, which, on the opposite side, rises abruptly for many hundreds of feet above, and from within a few yards of its margin. That leafy wood on one side, the low-lying meadows and undulating corn-cropped hills on the other, with the grey tower of Aymestry old church in front of us, form as pretty a variety of scenery as one might wish to see. Hereabouts, for the most part, the Lugg runs deep and slow, but with such trans-

parent clearness that the pebbles can be clearly seen at depths of eight or ten feet. I attribute my want of success to the extreme clearness, as well as unusual lowness, of the water. I caught nothing; I did not even see a rise or hear a splash. We returned to our inn hungry and disappointed.

Our landlady could furnish us with nothing better (and who would want anything better?) than a dish of broiled ham and eggs. Not being able to drink beer, and having a fearful recollection of the strength and roughness of Herefordshire cider, I asked for claret. The hostess took down a small bottle of St. Julien from an upper shelf; out of this she told me only one glass had been taken, which she would allow me for. I asked how long the wine had been uncorked. She did not quite remember, for it was some little time *before the flood!* I said I would prefer an unopened bottle.

It is proper to explain that "before the flood" did not in this case mean that remote period during which Noah was preparing for the great Deluge; but was referable to that other great flood which occurred last May, and had carried away many of the old stone bridges in Herefordshire and the adjoining counties and set afloat all the beer-barrels

and claret bottles in the inn-cellar. The bottle which my hostess brought me was one of these, with the label still damp ; but it was none the worse for that. The oldest inhabitant has no recollection of such a terrible flood as that of last May ; indeed, it is supposed to be over a hundred years since one like it occurred. Many a time, as a boy, have I seen the old river come down in its fury, covering acres of meadow-land, and carrying on its expanded breast stacks of hay and huge timber-trees ; but never had there been, in my early recollection, anything like the destruction wrought by the floods of last May.

After lunch I was sufficiently infatuated to try again at the river. I was told by the landlady that a veteran in the neighbourhood had, only a few days before, brought in seventeen fine trout—and why not I ? It is true, he had everything in his favour : he knew the water, he had a personal acquaintance with all the flies, he had a full river and charming weather ; while I had the worst possible weather—a sleety day with a cold north wind—and water which, in spite of the rain, was bright and low.

My few hours' fishing in the Lugg was a failure. I am certain that no one could

catch fish in such weather ; but that there is good fishing in the Shobdon Water I know full well, and I still hope for some future opportunity of vindicating the accuracy of my ancient recollections.

It may reasonably be asked—What is the advantage of this record of perpetual failure? That is not for me to say. I trust it has its advantages, if only as a curious contrast to the perpetual success which mostly inspires angling penmen. It seems to be my special mission to tell of failures. When, out of the fifty-two weeks of the year, one chooses *one week* for piscatorial exploits, and that one week turns out to be the most unpropitious of all the weeks of the year, is it not my misfortune, rather than my fault, that I am not permitted to tickle the ears and make restless the arms of enthusiastic anglers by telling them of abounding success?





LETTER No. III. [1886.

AFTER the shadowy Captain Cuthbert Clutterbuck had retired from being buffeted up and down the world in the service of his country, on the enjoyment of a clean shirt and a guinea four times a week, and before he found his true vocation as the antiquarian and historian of the ruins of the monastery of Kennaquhair, he made the great discovery that, "in order to enjoy leisure it is absolutely necessary that it should be preceded by occupation."

"For some time," says he, "it was delightful to wake at daybreak dreaming of the reveille—then to recollect my happy emancipation, turn on my other side, damn the parade, and go to sleep again! But even this enjoyment had its termination, and time began to hang heavy on my hands."

The Captain adds that he angled for two days, during which time he "lost twenty hooks and several scores of yards of gut and

line, and caught not even a minnow." Other experiments for killing time he tried, and at length had nothing for it but "to walk in the churchyard and whistle till it was dinner-time."

Why do I quote the renowned but little-read Captain at this point? Because Friday was a terrific day for me; a steady, unbroken downpour. For a busy man "the happy vacuity of all employment" was delicious enough in anticipation; but how to spend my own "happy vacuity" in a farmhouse on a rainy day was a problem which time helped me to solve somehow. It was a day to be remembered at the farm. Two sons were busy in preparing for their voyage to South America, in charge of the animals I have previously mentioned. Packing sacks of chopped provender for the cattle, branding the animals, and starting them off to the railway made a busy time. All were cleared out at an early hour. The master had gone with his sons to Liverpool, and I had to get through the wet day as best I could. I, too, was almost reduced "to whistle till dinner-time."

I well remember a similar day passed in another farmhouse many years ago, and this is how we spent it:—

It rained in torrents all day ; there was no cessation of the steady, straight downpour from early morning until late at night. We were a houseful of visitors, young and old, and we were weatherbound. I might, it is true, have gone a-fishing, as I have done before on a wet August morning ; but then there were glimpses of hope, bits of blue breaking now and then through the clouds. On this occasion there was no such hope ; the sky was leaden all around, and so we stayed at home.

There were a dozen girls and boys, ranging from seven to fourteen ; a country parson and his wife, on a visit from a distant county ; and two other married couples. What could be done to amuse such a party on such a day in such a place ?

A bright and enthusiastic youngster of ten suggested that we should all go to the barn and have a swing !—and to the barn we went. The distance was only across the fold, but mackintoshes and umbrellas were needed for the short excursion of a hundred yards. The barn floor was soon cleared ; a strong waggon rope was attached to the crossbeams on either side, and so a capital swing was made, a wisp of straw being tied on to form a comfortable seat.

Our venerable, bald, and fat friend, the parson, entered into the fun with zest, and it was voted that, as he was the oldest and by far the heaviest of the company, he should have the first go! If the rope and timbers would bear his weight they would certainly be quite safe for all the rest; so the parson was the first to mount the swing. Under his weight the timbers creaked and the rope stretched; but all held firmly. The youngsters swung the parson, and the parson swung the rope till his toes before and his heels behind kicked the rafters front and back, and it certainly was amusing to see this jolly old boy of twenty stone swinging through the air to the children's song, varied for the occasion :—

"The *Parson*, the Baker,
The Candlestick maker,
Spick, span, randerry Dan,
One for the Master, and one for the Man,
One for the King, and one for the Queen,
And a last toss over the bowling-green."

Our parson laughed at the ludicrous exhibition he was making till he grew red in the face; but it was only when he began to show gasping signs of apoplexy that he was gradually allowed to die down, and descend from his perilous position. Then his wife, as jolly and almost as fat as himself, was

urged to take her turn : but she would not be persuaded.

When, "barring all pother, 'twixt one and the t'other," we had all been kings and queens of the swing in our turn, and had had enough of it, we turned our attention to "Egg in the Hat," "Turn the Trencher," "Blindman's Buff," and other juvenile games.

Our parson was a grave and severe divine—a local celebrity as a preacher and worker—and we feared he would have lectured us on our lightmindedness and frivolity, for he had begun by patting a bright little girl, and assuring her that "folly is bound up in the heart of a child," and the youngsters all feared lest he should seek to improve the occasion in a more serious way ; but he proved to be what they irreverently called "a jolly old cock." He acknowledged that he had not spent a merrier or pleasanter day for many a year, than this time of enforced relaxation from thoughtful study and hard work on a rainy day in an old farmhouse.

That was the way we passed a wet day long ago. Of the children of that time some, alas ! are dead ; some are fathers and mothers, and are scattered hither and thither over the wide world. Now, let me tell you

how I spent last Friday, a day as like that other day for steadiness of downpour as could be.

Playing at chess with a young lady for two hours helped me along agreeably enough till lunch-time ; then, sheltered by my mackintosh, I went out to the farmyard to look at the animals and the bedraggled poultry, and to watch three swallows feeding their lazy young ones. They could fly just as well as the old birds ; but they preferred to sit on a rail in a row for ten minutes at a time, now and then fluttering their wings to shake the rain off, whilst the old birds busied themselves in the pelting rain by flitting round for flies ; these they would drop while still in motion into the greedy maws of the idle young birds twittering and fluttering their expectant wings on the rail.

Then I took an axe with the intention of performing some Gladstonian feats in the woodhouse ; of that operation I soon tired. As a last resource and a happy thought, I found an old scythe, and, in spite of rain, I sallied forth into the orchard to mow thistles, of which there was a too plentiful crop. Now at last have I found my true vocation. I astonished myself at the neatness with which I could swing the scythe and "lay

low the slender" thistles ! I worked till the perspiration poured through my mackintosh. I came upon a strong bed of nettles. I was going to attack them, but I was warned off. There was a sad tragedy connected with those nettles : they formed the covering of a sepulchre ; they sprang from the bodies of a hundred ewes buried underneath !

These splendid Shropshire Downs had fallen victims to an epidemic which ran through the country four years ago. They all died in two days—a sad and sudden loss to the farmer of nearly £400. I did not venture on that bed of nettles.

After dinner another game of chess, and so to bed, but not to sleep—my bones ached too much for that. Swinging an axe or a scythe is splendid exercise for the muscles, but then the muscles have to become used to such exercises—mine had not.





LETTER No. IV. [1886.



SATURDAY was a fine and pleasant day, but my bones still ached so much from the unwonted exertion of mowing and wood chopping on the previous day that I did not care to go a-fishing. I wandered aimlessly about the farm ; I watched the haymakers, but was too lazy to take pike or rake in hand myself, although in this catching weather hands were badly wanted. Meadows of hay were still out that had been cut for weeks, and the hay, all but spoilt, was now being hastily opened out to wind and sun.

This day should see a good deal of it in stack or piled in large cocks ; some meadows were still unmown. Hay-harvest is unusually late ; but crops, if saved, will be very heavy. Corn-harvest will come close upon its heels, and give the farmer but little chance of his brief holiday at the sea between the harvests. The grass land on this farm is of the sort

that nourishes and fattens those beautiful cattle, some of which are at this moment moaning and groaning on the Atlantic Ocean. I felt pity for those cows as I saw them for the last time innocently and unconsciously cropping their last meal from their native meadows. I wonder what they think of it all now ! What a "muddle" the whole system of creation must seem to them !

The workmen on this and the neighbouring farms are fine fellows, and some of them are handsome. There is nothing of the yokel about them ; they know perfectly well what their duties are, and they go about them in a business-like way. They despise the "Three-acres-and-a-cow" theory, and think themselves better off as they are.

On this farm the men get thirteen shillings a week all the year round, a good, well-built roomy cottage and garden rent free, and a sufficient patch of potato ground ; a supply of cider all the year, except from November to January—quantity from four to six quarts a day, according to the heat of the weather or the thirst of the individual ; also two pounds extra for harvest work. The cowman gets his Sunday dinner all through the year ; the shepherd an extra sovereign and a bottle of gin for the lambing season ; and the wag-

goner gets five shillings for every live cart colt that is foaled. These various items, put together, are considered to be equal to a clear eighteen shillings a week.

I met with a jolly old lady of eighty-five, who entertained great contempt for the luxuries and effeminacy of the present time.

"My feyther and mother," said she, "were good, pious people; they reardened ten children, most on 'em in heaven now. I was married very young, and I began to work 'ith my two honds. I have had twelve myself; ten lived to be married, and some have died since. I have sixty-two grandchildren, and, laws! I canna tell how many—I think about forty great-grandchildren. We hadn' no flowers nor flounces in them days; it was as much as I could do to get summut clane to put on 'em. My husband worked for twenty year on eight shillin' a week, an' now tha' binna satisfied wi' thirteen shillin'! We gotten one cow first, an' then after we gotten three cows an' a bit more lond, and then we gotten a small farm. My children and gran'-children bin all doin' fairly well. I've got enough to keep me, thank God! I worked as hard as ever till I was eighty, and then I thought it was time for me to give up, and take it easy-like for the rest of my days,

•

nobbut what I can do a day's work an' get my livin' now as well as ever, if needs be."

I was surprised to see the immense flocks of plovers, or, as they are variously called, *Lapwings* or *Peewits*, that hover about this farm. In every country where this bird is found it seems to get a name after its peculiar cry. The French say the cry is perfectly characterized by the two syllables *dix-huit*; it is sometimes called *re-wit* and *tre-wit*. I have never tasted plover.

There is a French proverb which says, "He who has never eaten the right wing of a lapwing has not eaten *de bon morceau*." Bewick says that in the month of October they are very fat, and are then "*said* to be very excellent eating"—from which it may be inferred that he had never tasted one. I have not met with anyone who has eaten plover.

"There's some kinds of fishes that's better than others," says Mrs. Alenside, "but, as a general rule, a fish is a fish, and if you catch 'em you can eat 'em; but it's a very different thing with birds. When you've never seen 'em before, how are you goin' to tell but what they're some kin to an owl, a pigeon-hawk, or a crow?"

I had an idea that a plover was tainted

with some such relationship ; opinions, however, are divided on this subject. But of plovers' eggs, who does not remember the delicious flavour ? The young farmers are just becoming alive to the fact that plovers' eggs are worth threepence each or more in the market. Knowing gamekeepers used to monopolize them by scouring the furrows in the early morning ; but now that the boys have discovered that during the season they can make ten or twelve shillings a week before breakfast by keeping an eye on the plovers, the gamekeepers' game is up.

Plovers, like wood-pigeons, are ignorant of the art of nest-building : they deposit their eggs on a few straws or dried grass in the furrows of a ploughed field, and then trust to their own ingenuity for their protection. They lay four eggs of a dirty olive, spotted black. The young run about swiftly so soon as they are out of the shell. It is amusing to watch the devices of the old birds to decoy you or your dog away from their nests ; their pretence of lameness or of a broken wing, rolling over and over on the ground, always keeping just out of reach of the exasperated dog, is quite ludicrous—anything to make you believe the nest is somewhere else than just under your feet.

This, of course, is not the season for eggs, but it is funny enough to note how these cunning birds strive to keep their practice up by making believe that they have still something from which to divert your attention. They seem to know exactly what a dog can do, and how far a gun will carry, and they flutter and hover about, always quite innocently, but just out of range of dog or gun.

Owls used to be very numerous about here ; but since the old barns were pulled down, and new ones erected, they have almost disappeared. They seem to belong to a dying-out race, and cannot put up with such innovations as brick-built and slate-roofed barns. Old thatch-covered, tumble-down buildings, with plenty of mice about, suit them best, and as these old buildings give place to new ones the old-fashioned race of barn owls will disappear from the country.

"The mousing owl" is still to be heard in the neighbouring woods complaining to the moon. He is said by Gilbert White to hoot in three keys—in G flat or F sharp, in B flat, and A flat.

Sunday was a *dies non*, so far as this record is concerned. By Monday morning I am myself again, beginning to feel quite at home on the farm just as I am compelled to

leave it. This was really my day of return ; but I was reminded that it was Bank Holiday, and the weather, hitherto so disastrous, was now such as made it a pleasure only to exist ; and the pretty little bright-eyed scarlet pimpernel, here known as "the poor man's weather-glass," ablaze on the banks by the roadside, told of a continuance of this fine weather, so I was easily tempted to postpone my departure for a day or two, and in the evening to make another attack on the fish.

It was too hot and bright, and the water too low for even the most mendacious fisherman to avow, with any hope of being believed, that he had caught, or could catch, a creel full of fish on such a day, so I postponed my last visit to this part of the Teme till the evening, the river Lugg being, I am sorry to say, too far away. I cannot describe what I have not seen of the Teme, and I have only now seen that bit of it which winds through the water meadows from Lingen bridge to Leintwardine. It rises in the mountains that divide Radnorshire from Montgomeryshire, flowing eastward, past Knighton, and through the Vale of Brampton Brian.

Here it is but a small stream, and in dry seasons is almost absorbed by its gravelly

bed. Of itself it possesses no special claim to beauty or attractiveness ; but its surroundings are very charming. It has a lovely background formed by the village of Brampton Bryan, the handsome brick-built mansion of Squire Harley, the owner of the estate, and the ruins of an old castle, half hidden amongst the abounding tall trees and lower foliage which encompass it ; the pine-clad heights of Brampton Bryan Park limit the view in that direction. It is to the courtesy of the owner of this beautiful estate that I am indebted for permission to fish in this stretch of the Teme.

Looking to the south and east, the wide, open valley of Leintwardine is bounded by the hills which surround the old town of Ludlow, and the range which trends southward to Bircher Common, Croft Ambrey, and Pokehouse Wood. The grey tower of Leintwardine church stands well up from the village, which nestles in the north-eastern corner of the valley. Just above Leintwardine bridge the river Clun pours its waters into the Teme, and thenceforward the Teme becomes a large and important stream, wending its crooked way among the hills, beneath Cæsar's Camp, past and amidst the lovely scenery of Downton Castle, to Oakley

Park, the scene of Milton's "Comus," to Ludlow, and so—

"by many winding nooks it strays,
With willing sport, to the wild ocean."

Two Gentlemen of Verona.

Now to my fishing. I set up my tackle in a meadow on the Buckton Park Farm. My leading fly was probably a novelty in this water—a small Dun fly with a Red Tag, called by the learned "Yates's Fancy;" my second was a fly with a bright green body and light wings, called the "Emerald Dun." At my first throw I rose a fish, and this filled me with courage and hope. I threw again in a rippling stream, and allowed my flies to float gently down over the spot where they had before attracted a rise; and now he comes again! I gave a firm but quick upward movement to the rod, and hooked him. Off he darted up stream till I gradually wound him in; (my trusty and too enthusiastic young friend Chris. had gone to the Post-office). I had nearly brought him within reach, when the sight of my net gave him a fresh start, and off he went again. I once more hauled him in, and a beautiful grayling swam into my net, with "Yates's Fancy" firmly hooked in his upper lip. This was encouraging.

Instead of confining myself to the bank, I waded for the most part up the shallow streams, and before Chris. arrived I had two more fine grayling in my basket—all victims to the seductiveness of the Red Tag on "Yates's Fancy."

On we went, buoyant with hope ; but I fished for an hour without another rise. Luck seemed to desert me when Chris. came on the scene ; he was too eager, and kept too close behind me. Once I made a beautiful cast intended to captivate a rising fish ; luckily it was but a gentle throw, for it hooked poor Chris. by the chin, and gave him a slight scratch only. Had it been one of my long and vigorous casts, "Yates's Fancy" would certainly have been imbedded in his flesh, and I should have been compelled to perform a severe and doubtless clumsy surgical operation ; this incident was a lesson for both of us.

Shortly afterwards I had another rise, and hooked my fish ; this time it was a trout that had a fancy for my green-bodied insect, and we got him ashore nicely. Again I fished for half an hour, and was rewarded with another grayling, and so my fishing ended.



LETTER No. V.

TURKEYS AND PEACOCKS.

"Should I, however, in the course of my loiterings about this old mansion see or hear anything curious that might serve to vary the monotony of this every-day life, I shall not fail to report upon it for the reader's entertainment."—*Bracebridge Hall.*



TURKEYS, especially at a certain season of the year, appeal with irresistible attractiveness, not only to anglers, but to all men ; and as for peacocks—does not their delicate plumage contribute largely to an angler's beatitude ?

Its English name is said to have been given to this bird from a mistaken notion that it was originally brought to England from Turkey ; and in the account of the battle given below I have assumed that the turkey is a Turk in his origin ; but I believe it is now well known that he was imported from America—probably by Sir Walter Raleigh—and it is pos-

sibly true, as our venerated master, Izaak Walton, quotes from Sir Richard Baker :—

“ Hops and turkeys, carps and beer,
Came into England all in one year.”

There was a time, not so very long ago, when turkeys, about Christmas time, used to walk up to London from distant counties, not so much of their own accord or for sight-seeing, as to be seen and eaten. I have seen hundreds of them come in large flocks. Now they come in thousands by rail, and van, and market cart.

Of the delicate flavour of turkey, roast or boiled, or its digestible qualities, I need not speak—they are already not unknown ; but the powers of digestion which a turkey possesses are perhaps not so widely understood.

The ingenious Spallanzani made the following experiments of this bird's capacity :—Twelve strong needles were firmly fixed in a ball of lead, the points of which projected about $\frac{1}{4}$ in. from the surface ; thus armed, it was covered with a case of paper, and crammed down the turkey's throat ; the bird retained it a day and a half without showing the least symptom of uneasiness ; the points of all the needles were broken off close to the

surface of the ball, except two or three of which the stumps projected a little. Another instance may be mentioned, in which twelve small lancets, very sharp, were fixed in a similar ball of lead, which was administered in the same way to a turkey-cock, and left eight hours in the stomach. The organ was then opened; but nothing appeared except the naked ball; the twelve lancets having been broken to pieces, the stomach remaining perfectly sound and entire. I am not prepared to say that these are not "crammers" in another sense.

The following instance of the turkey's pugnacity came under my own observation.

I was loitering about the farm one morning, when I witnessed a scene which was novel and curious to me, and, so far as I could learn, had rarely been seen by the people about the place. I was watching the farmer's flock of turkeys, about a score or so, industriously at work under the apple trees in the orchard—at work with a sense of proprietorship of the land they occupied, which gave dignity and repose to their movements; just as every cock knows his own dunghill, and is the lord and proud master thereof.

I have observed, by the way, that all the animals and poultry about a farm seem to

know, by intuition, the limits of their own fields ; where they have a right to go, and where they sometimes go without any right. On their own ground they have a look of self-importance and honest pride that would scorn an evil deed ; but when they go where they know they ought not to go, they look, and I am sure they feel, like sneaks and humbugs, however much they may try to disguise that consciousness. A pig in the farmyard is a pig in satisfied possession of his rights ; but if by accident a gate has been left open, and he sneaks into the kitchen garden, he knows perfectly well that he is a burglar. How excitedly he pegs into the young potatoes or luscious green food, how well he knows that his opportunity is short, how cleverly he makes the best of it, and how quickly he scampers away at the bang of a door or crunch of a footstep.

The Sultan of our Turks was strutting about in an excited manner, and working himself into a tremendous passion. Sometimes I have noticed that he ruffles himself up in this way out of a feeling of pride and vanity, for the purpose of showing himself off to the admiring gaze of his family ; but on this occasion he was animated by passion and insulted dignity. His long coxcomb (or

whatever else it is called) and his scarlet wattles hung down over his beak and from his cheeks like flaming flags of wrath ; he stamped about with his feet, and trailed the points of his down-stretched wings along the ground. He was in a rage, and I wondered what on earth, in that peaceful scene, surrounded as he was by his happy family, could possibly have aroused his ire.

Looking over into the adjoining field I saw our neighbour's flock, and the Sultan thereof was strutting about in the same preposterous way, now and again uttering a loud note of defiance, which sounded more like *bother-other-other-ation* than anything else. Presently a hen turkey made her way through a glat in the hedge, and began picking about in our orchard, in a make-believe-unconscious way, as though she had a perfect right to be there, but knowing all the time that she was a thief and an intruder.

She was immediately followed, one by one, by the whole family, last of all by the commander-in-chief himself ; and they spread out in skirmishing order, pretending to be innocently picking up worms. This was altogether too much for our already-excited Sultan ; it was aggravating enough to have defiance hurled at him over the hedge, but

to have his own territory invaded in this impudent way was altogether beyond his Turkish endurance. Foaming with indignation, he shouted his war-cry, and set his army in battle array. He did not form a square, in accordance with the warlike method of his adopted country—he preferred the plan of his native land ; he disposed his troops in a long single line, and then, in trumpet-like voice, “Show me,” said he, “whose men you be, that hunt so boldly here !”

Meanwhile the wily chief of the opposing forces had not been idle ; he, too, had marshalled his men. If their arms were a score, “their hearts were but one,” and he hurled back his defiant reply :—

“ We list not to declare,” said he,
 “ Nor show whose men we be :
 Yet will we spend our dearest blood,
 Thy chiefest *hens* to slay.”

Our Sultan swore a solemn oath, and thus in rage did say :—

“ Ere thus I will outbraved be,
 One of us two shall die.
 Let thou and I the battle try
 And set our men aside.”

But the young cocks and hens'on either side were as eager for battle as their chiefs, and

wouldn't listen to a single-handed combat ; so at it they went—not by any means in a helter-skelter sort of way, as one might have expected from these hot-headed, hare-brained birds.

They marched straight up in single line, the two chiefs at the head of their respective columns, until they came within a yard of each other, face to face ; then our gallant leader gobbled something which sounded like—

“ Come on, Macduff,
And cursed be he that first cries, ‘ Hold—enough ! ’ ”

And so they strutted, and swore, and spat at each other, and the battle began, but in a wary, deliberate fashion. I was amused to see them bowing to each other, in what seemed a polite, gentlemanly way, but really they were only manœuvring ; it was curious to see their heads bobbing up and down, and I wondered when they were going to begin. But turkeys don't fight in a vulgar way, with their whole bodies, beaks, spurs, legs and wings, like “ tame villatic fowls.” These fought on scientific principles, and only with their beaks. I soon discovered that their method was to try to get hold of each other's lower jaw, and the moment one opened his beak his opponent would dart at

him and endeavour to seize that jaw in his mouth. And woe betide him when that hold was got ; it was the grip of a bulldog—it seemed as if nothing but death would unloose that grip.

They were equally matched as to numbers, and the battle raged long and furiously ; nearly every bird got hooked by the jaw in this way, and the great struggle was to tug themselves free.

So far as I could see, they used no other weapon ; they made no attempt to strike with their wings or their legs. "When *Turk* meets *Turk* then comes the *tug* of war," and for a long time victory hung in an equal balance ; when all of a sudden the invaders threw up the sponge, turned tail, and beat a dignified, slow retreat.

The conquerors had seemingly had enough of it, for they did not pursue the vanquished ; they allowed them "bag and baggage" to pass in single file through the glat by which they had entered, and I don't think they will soon return.

Chanticleer, it is said, never makes more noise than "quand il est bien battu," a remark equally true of that thoroughly-thrashed, but still defiant, turkey-cock ; for no sooner has he got back to his own domain than "he

stoutly struts his dames before," makes a louder botheration than ever, and boasts that *he* was the conqueror, and all his young cocks and hens believe him.

* * * *

"The matchless plumage of the peacock," says Buffon, "seems to combine all that delights the eye in the soft and delicate tints of the finest flowers, all that dazzles it in the sparkling lustre of gems, and all that astonishes it in the grand display of the rainbow."

These birds were originally brought from India, and thence have been diffused over the civilized world. We are told that King Solomon imported them in ships from Tarshish, which brought him "gold and silver, ivory, and apes and peacocks."

The peahen is destitute of those dazzling beauties which adorn her lord. She lays five or six eggs in some out-of-the-way, secret place beyond the knowledge of her husband, who has a mean habit of smashing them. His doing this causes a domestic rupture of many days, during which his fine feathers and his coaxing, croaking entreaties are displayed in vain. His wife treats him with haughty disdain, and will not be seen in his company.

The females sometimes assume the plumage of the male. This is said to take place after they have done laying. A specimen in this state of transformation is preserved in the British Museum.

In this connection I may remark that Dr. McCormick, in his great work, "Voyages of Discovery in the Arctic and Antarctic Seas," describes a similar *lusus naturæ* in the case of a tame Aylesbury duck, which he had reared from a duckling. She laid 120 eggs the first year, and so continued until her tenth year, when she ceased laying, and then assumed the curled tail-feathers of the drake. A most amusing and interesting account of this duck will be found at page 359 *et seq.* of Vol. II. of the above-named work.

"When pleased or delighted, and in the sight of his females, the peacock erects his train and displays the majesty of his beauty. All his movements are full of dignity; his head and neck bend nobly back, his pace is slow and solemn, and he frequently turns slowly and gracefully round, as if to catch the sunbeams in every direction, and produce new colours of inconceivable richness."

So says Thomas Bewick; but I have sometimes seen the peacock in a less dignified and less satisfied state of mind. Did

you ever watch a peacock as Wordsworth describes him?—

“The peacock in the broad ash tree
Aloft is roosted for the night,
He who in proud prosperity
Of colours manifold and bright
Walked round affronting the daylight.”

This is fine, but it is poetical rather than precise, and one of the oddest things I have seen about a farm is a peacock going to roost. Then does he present a most comical combination of wounded pride, vanity, humiliation, imbecility, and indecision. I think it is just one of those occasions on which he hates to be watched, or even looked at; he seems to know he is going to make a fool of himself. He is far too proud to take up his lodging on the cold ground, or upon a gate, upon the rafters or top of a shed; nothing less than a strong branch of some tall tree for a roost will suit his dignity and self-importance, and I fancy the great trial of his life is that nightly ascent which he seems bound to make, but always in dread of some great disaster either to his neck or his precious tail. It is laughable to see him peck round, as he gradually nears the tree, now and again glancing up, then pecking round, then making believe that he is going to start,

and, while he is hesitating "twixt the will and deed," madame, his wife, comes along, and, without any fuss, "takes the leap at her full speed" and reaches the branch; but he still exhibits the most ludicrous indecision. Pecking, or pretending to peck, round about, he makes endless attempts to start; he half opens his wings, and then thinks better of it. Thus have I watched him—

"Letting I dare not wait upon I would
Like the poor cat i' the adage"—

for more than half an hour at a time. His courage is at length screwed up; he seems to think it *must* be done, but he cannot venture to make a start from level ground. Like Peter Wilkins's "Flying Woman," he always selects a tree near a steep bank, off whose edge he can launch himself with the least chance of danger to his tail, and so, in the uncertain hope of going up, but always with the accompanying fear that he may go down, away he goes at length, and, really, as he is flying up, he has nothing to be ashamed of, for his floating, rather than flying (when once he gets off the ground), with his tail partly spread out like a sail, is most graceful.

If he and his wife happen to be on a friendly footing, he condescends to land himself be-

side her on the same branch ; but, if there has been a tiff between them, as very frequently happens, he seeks another and a higher branch, and roosts by himself. I have never had the pleasure of seeing him come down from his perch ; he gets up, or rather comes down, much too early in the morning for me to witness his descent.





LETTER No. VI. [1886.

BY TEME-SIDE, AT LUDLOW.



"I' mony a vow" to return at first convenient season, I tore myself away from THE OLD FARMHOUSE where, in spite of wind and weather, I had passed a pleasant week. Before leaving the country I decided to spend a day at Ludlow and to make another attack on the Teme in that neighbourhood.

Ludlow, as you know, is a picturesque old town, beautifully situated on a hill, partly surrounded by hills, dominated by the tall tower of the fine old church and the ruins of the Castle, which command lovely views on all sides. I am not an antiquarian, and I am not going to poke about amongst the old walls of this old Castle ; I am going to angle in the Teme, which here has grown into a fine stream half encircling the town, and is backed up by the rocky cliffs of a delightful

hill called Whitlift. Everybody knows that Ludlow Castle is the place where "Comus" was first performed before the Earl of Bridgewater, and that Samuel Butler once dwelt in a corner of it and wrote "Hudibras" there. Surely that is fame enough for any old castle. Now I go a-fishing.

I started about six o'clock in the evening of a lovely summer's day, my destination being the grassy meadows below Ludford Mill. As I was crossing the quaint old bridge at the bottom of the town my attention was arrested by a curious figure in the water; it was a sweep fly-fishing, and as he fished there in the middle of the broad and shallow stream, under the shadow of the high cliffs of Whitlift, he formed the centre of a weird picture which Gustave Doré might have delighted to paint. His face was as black as soot could make it; the hat he wore was, naturally, a "chimney-pot"; but it was not all a hat—part of the brim was gone, and the crown was battered in. His breeches were tucked up above his knees, and bare-legged he waded in the river. His rod was of an ancient make, and must have been in the family for a generation or two; but it was strong and pliant, and he wielded it with the hand of a master.

How I admired the perfect ease with which he cast his flies upon the water. He was fishing up stream, and while I watched him for a quarter of an hour or so, he hooked, but did not land—he pocketed—three fine trout. He had no landing-net, but wading as he was in mid-stream, he played his fish with consummate skill, and gradually wound him up within arm's reach, then unhooked and quietly dropped him into the capacious pocket of his ragged but useful jacket.

A glint of satisfaction in the white of his eyes, which shone out of the blackness of his face, and a grim smile, which showed his red lips and a perfect double row of "shining ossifications," were all the signs of excitement he displayed, and to work he went again.

I am sorry I could not get near enough to speak to him; he was too far off, and in the middle of the river. I should have been glad to examine his flies; these I'll warrant were as home-made as his rod. His was doubtless a lifelong experience; he must have fished that selfsame spot when he was a boy, taught, no doubt, by a paternal sweep before him. His skill was hereditary; and with him, in another part of the same water, was his son, a lad of twelve or thirteen, a chip of the old

block, "an innocent blackness," as sooty, as ragged, and almost as expert as himself.

The boy was naked up to the thighs ; his head was bare, but covered with a shock of tangled hair—

"And through its folds the wild winds sang a song."

He got no rise while I was looking on, but he threw his fly with a neat and tender hand. Truly he had been well educated ; there was a sureness, a certainty, a satisfaction in his cast which betrayed long experience and in-born aptitude. I would back him against many of your scientific anglers.

These are the born fishermen, who, if truth were told, do oftentimes help to fill the baskets of which you so loudly boast ! Happy sweeps !

After watching this scientific display of native genius for some minutes, I humbly wended my way down stream to my own fishing-ground.

I began with my accustomed vigour. I have learnt to throw cautiously and carefully, and sometimes, when the wind is with me and the space is open and free from trees and bushes, I can make a very fair cast indeed ; but somehow I can never be certain about it. My fly frequently goeth where it listeth, not where I list. There seems to be a peculiar

twist of the wrist, a knack which has not come to my unaccustomed fist. I think I know how to do it, but somehow I don't do it.

I fished down two or three meadows for an hour or so, and I hooked and landed one nice trout and one grayling. I did not become excited, and exhibit my trophies to all passers-by, as in my youthful "Dove Dale Days." I quietly dropped them into my basket, and resumed my sport with businesslike gravity.

On the opposite side of the river was another sportsman, and I am happy to say that although he was a dweller in the town of Ludlow, and probably a Teme fisherman all his days, he certainly was a thorough "muff."

He flogged one hole for a quarter of an hour in a most outrageous way, and then, to his extreme bewilderment, he got hooked in the upper branches of a tall tree. He began by flinging up big stones and sticks in the vain hope of dislodging his flies. Then he shouted across to me, and asked me if I would mind staying where I was, and keep a look-out for the safety of his basket, rod, and treed flies, and see that they didn't fly away while he ran home, a mile and a half or so, to get a ladder. I told him I didn't much mind. I fished about there for some time, but with no more success, till I was tired, and, as it was getting late and

he did not turn up, I felt no compunction in leaving his things to take care of themselves. I was marching off across the meadow when I descried him and another man trailing an immense ladder, and I confess I felt some elation at the thought that there are more duffers than one in the angling world.





LETTER No. VII. [1886.

OSTERLEY PARK LAKE ON A BANK HOLIDAY.

" Much for my sport I cannot say,
Though, mind, I like the fun ;
Here have I sat the livelong day
Without extracting one."

Frank Buckland's Life.



NCE upon a time I found myself a solitary unit amongst a couple of thousand joyful holiday makers besieging the gates of the South-Western Railway at eleven a.m. on Bank Holiday. I had taken a first-class ticket, and eventually became the sole occupant of a first-class smoking compartment ; but I was not long sole possessor, for the crowd surged in. Jack opened the door, followed by Tom, Bill, and 'Arry, their sisters, their cousins, their mothers and their aunts, with a few babies. On seeing the ladies, I ventured to remark that it was a smoking compartment. Yes, they all knew that ; there was nothing they liked better ;

and the males of course lighted up their pipes. The compartment was crammed to suffocation, and I lamented that I had thrown my money away on a first-class ticket, when less than half would have given me the same accommodation.

I was not before aware that all the carriages are "mixed promiscuous like" on Bank Holidays, and the greatest fun of all is to get a first-class seat for a third-class fare. My destination was nowhere in particular, so I landed at Isleworth; and seeing before me a piscator laden with creel on his back and rod and landing-net in hand, I followed his lead, knowing he would lead to some pleasant place. After two miles plodding through rain and mud, he reached the gates of Osterley Park, and there he vanished from my sight.

Osterley Park Lake was besieged on Bank Holiday by a small army of, say a hundred, piscators, all armed to the teeth. Their sport was not the most exhilarating; but everybody knows what British perseverance means: it is exhibited alike among the Afghans of Asia, the Zulus of Africa, and on the banks of rivers and lakes in Old England. On entering the park I was guided in the direction of the lake by perceiving in the distance (at very frequent intervals and forming

nearly a circle) small columns of blue smoke curling upwards, which, on approaching nearer, I found to arise from the hundred enthusiastic anglers. Every man Jack of them had a pipe in his mouth, and was smoking away as if in obedience to a law of his master, the venerable Izaak Walton.

In an army of heroes there is always one superlative hero who comes to the front. In Osterley Park the hero of the day commenced warlike operations against the finny tribe at six o'clock in the morning—and what a morning it was!—the rain fell continuously, and for the most part in torrents, up to twelve o'clock; after that time the sun burst forth gloriously, and the anglers were rewarded for the drenching toils of the morning by a splendid afternoon.

I saw our special hero at three o'clock intently watching for a nibble on the identical spot he had occupied from early morning—at that time his perseverance had been rewarded by two, perhaps three, small roach running three or four inches in length, and of proportionate girth; when I left the scene of his exploits he was still cheerfully labouring away, and he evidently meant to continue till the shades of evening closed over him; indeed, it would not surprise me to learn that he re-

mained in close proximity to the lake all night, and was found doggedly and joyfully at work next morning by sunrise—such is the tenacity, such the perseverance, of your true angler !

I own to my shame that I belong not to the gentle craft. I am merely an "amateur." Chance had led me to this jolly anglers' resort. I sauntered several times round the charming lake, enjoying the beauty of the scenery immensely, and glancing furtively at the happy anglers as I went round. Many of them had stripped off shoes, stockings, and trousers, and were visible above the water only down to the point where human unity is lost in duality.

Others had squatted down on the roots of old trees ; some were fixed on camp-stools ; others again had planted their rods on little props, and left them to catch the fish which did not come. Some were occupied in what is called *ledgering* ; some trolling with artificial baits and wonderful spinners ; some with live bait—which means with a hook stuck through the back of a poor little live roach or perch, and jerked vigorously to and fro, from air to water and from water to air ; some with worms and floats, others with wasp-grubs, &c.

Live bait, I was told, was a certain and

destructive bait, but it must have been extremely scarce, for never shall I forget the shout of joy which arose from a small *posse* of earnest anglers, when one of them, a young gentleman with naked legs, safely landed a little roach, which he kindly handed over to a brother angler, who was anxious to try live-bait fishing, but had before sought in vain for a bait. A special pool was made for this precious little fish to keep alive and kicking in, whilst the proper tackle was being prepared for him.

At length I had the gratification of seeing him wriggling on the hook, and swinging through the air into the water again, but I saw nothing particularly destructive in these gyrations, except the gradual destruction of the little creature's life. I used the word "gratification" just now because I was assured, on the great and indubitable authority of Izaak Walton, whom all piscators worship, that the roach not only feels no pain, but positively delights in this unwonted exercise. He tells us that "a perch is the longest lived on the hook," and that "having cut off his fin on his back, *which may be done without hurting him*,¹ you must take your knife,

¹ This curious notion that the mutilation of a living creature does not give it pain has probably arisen from the

which cannot be too sharp, and betwixt the head and the fin on the back cut or make an incision, or such a scar as you may put the arming wire of your hook into it . . . and so carrying your arming wire along his back . . . draw out that wire at another scar near to his tail," &c. I will not presume to differ from so supreme an authority ; still I own the extraordinary wriggling and gasping of the little fish struck me as a curious manifestation of pleasure. I am aware that all anglers act upon the conviction that none of these cold-blooded creatures—roach, perch, frogs, or worms—can possibly feel anything like agony when their knives and hooks are forced through their vitals in the way above described. Of course for a warm-blooded mortal like the venerable Izaak the sensation would be different if—

"That quaint, old, cruel coxcomb, in his gullet
Should have a hook, and a small trout to pull it."

Don Juan.

In wandering amongst these jolly anglers I felt, I confess, a good deal like a "fish out

gradual misuse of the verb "to hurt"—whose signification was originally limited to "to injure,"—and had no reference to suffering inflicted by the injury. *Without hurting him* in Walton's time meant without injuring him for the purpose for which he is intended—in other words, without making him dead instead of live-bait.

of water." I was hungry and I was thirsty, and I had thoughtlessly omitted to provide for such contingencies. Around me on all sides were provisions in baskets and tins and boxes, and beer in bottles and stone jars, and whisky in flasks and casks—beer and whisky everywhere, but not a drop to drink for me.

It seemed to me that when an angler is not fishing he is sure to be smoking, and when he is not smoking he is sure to be eating or drinking. It must of a certainty be hungry and thirsty work. Imagine how delighted I was, then, to discover two angling friends under a tree, earnestly smoking and fishing, as became them.

Their welcome of me was cordial, though I cannot say it was very much so. They have got the impression that I not only cannot catch fish myself, but that my very presence is the cause of their not catching any ! They think there is something antipathetic betwixt me and the fishes, and on river banks they prefer my absence to my company. Any way they regaled me handsomely, and I felt refreshed. They spread a cork seat for me on the margin of the lake.

I had no sooner reclined thereon than I was startled by a buzzing round and round

my head, the sound of which I knew too well. I was reposing on a wasps' nest ! I do not accuse my friends of knowingly placing me in this position—it was, I feel nearly sure, unconsciously done by them. Wasps are uncommonly intelligent insects—they know by a glance whether you are a friend or an enemy. If you have gunpowder in your pocket, they can smell it, and woe betide you ! I passed through a trying scrutiny ; it was found that I had neither a rod in my hand nor powder in my pocket, nor any of their grubs in my possession, and I was generously permitted to beat a safe retreat.

I then betook myself to the stump of an old tree to finish my sandwich, but no sooner had I fixed myself than my ears were again assailed in the same unpleasant manner. Here was another wasps' nest under my very feet ! Again had I to pass through the same ordeal, and I was thankful to have got clear of these little soldiers without wounding their pride or being wounded by their daggers.

I observed amongst the piscators a youth making notes in a pocket-book, doubtless of the day's proceedings. He was probably getting up a report for an angling journal of the doings of the members of the different clubs represented on the banks. I cannot

say how far his report and mine may tally. I can only say that during the two or three hours I had closely watched the doings of these hundred rods, I only heard of one nibble, and saw caught the little roach I have already mentioned.

When weighing time came I do not, on my conscience, believe that the whole bulk of fishes which fell to the hundred anglers would turn the scale to one single pound *avoirdupois*! But those merry fellows were as happy as crickets, and enjoyed themselves thoroughly. It seemed to me that Osterley Park Lake is a famous place to fish in if you don't expect to catch any fish !





LETTER No. VIII. [1886.

IN A SUBURBAN GARDEN.

"And so you have a garden of your own, and you plant, and are dirty and amused. Are you not ashamed of yourself?"

* * * * *

"Dear ! how charming it must be to walk out into one's own *garding* and sit on a bench in the open air, with a fountain and leaden statue, and a rolling stone, and an arbour ! Have a care of sore throats, though, and the *agoe*."
—*Gray's Letters to Rev. Norton Nicholls.*



AM, as you know, a busy City man ; the never-ending duties of business keep me at my desk for ten hours a day—often more, seldom less ; so, you see, my angling experiences are limited to two or three weeks in a year. But my suburban garden is with me all the year round—not that I see very much of it, the City mill is too exacting.

During the winter months, when all outside is cold and dreary, when the sky is leaden and the sun never shines, I am contented

enough in my business, which has much in it to interest and amuse me ; but when—

“Tis a month before the month of May,
And the spring comes slowly up this way,”—

when my lawn begins to look green with the fresh young grass, when my early peas and beans are beginning to peep from underneath the fresh mould, and the pear and apple trees put forth their buds and blossoms—then, I confess, the bonds of never-ending business begin to be irksome ; for it is only in the early mornings, on Saturday afternoons, and on Sundays that I can watch and rejoice over these natural developments.

“I never had,” said Cowley, “any other desire so strong, and so like to covetousness, as that one which I have had always—that I may be master of a small house and a large garden,” and I am of the same way of thinking.

I have a really pleasant little suburban garden ; it is quite delightful when the golden laburnums and white and purple lilacs are in full bloom ; and although I live considerably within the postal radius, surrounded on all sides by houses, my garden is sometimes alive with the songs of many birds.

I am quite as ignorant as a City man may be expected to be of the natural history of

birds, but I hope I may be permitted to love them without a scientific knowledge of their habits, manners, and migrations. I welcome them when they pay me a visit, and it pleases me in leisure moments to watch their antics, and their little bright-eyed, tricky ways.

I am constantly reminded of the country by the songs of blackbirds and thrushes; robins and wrens are regular visitors. Occasionally I see in my apple trees chaffinches and green linnets, while starlings on my lawn and tomtits in the silver birch and mulberry trees are always quite at home. I have also seen, in the summer months, a pretty, shy little bird with a wailing note, breaking out sometimes into a sweet and clear warble, which I take to be "the garden warbler." It is very difficult to get sight of this bird, for it sings in amongst the leaves, and the moment one begins to look for it, it stops short in its song and is off like a dart.

In the little field in front of us we frequently have a pair or two of skylarks, though why they should come away from the beautiful meadows in the far-off country and pour forth their "music sweet as love" in the murky, foggy sky that generally overhangs that field I know not, unless they come out of pure

loving-kindness to us poor City mortals, to gladden our hearts with their sweet notes.

This year they began on the "Feast of St. Valentine," a cold and foggy morning ; and it was pleasant as surprising, from one's dressing-room window, for the first time this year—

"To hear the lark begin his flight,
And singing, startle the dull night
From his watch tower in the skies,
Till the dappled dawn doth rise."

Only, unfortunately, the dawn was not dappled—the little songsters could be heard but not seen ; their music came down through a dense fog, perhaps all the more thrillingly and with more chastened melody on that account.

Swallows, swifts, and martins occasionally venture so far over the surrounding chimney-pots as to float about over that meadow—surely more for our pleasure who see them, than for any special advantage to themselves ; but they never stay long, nor have I ever seen them alight on rail, or tree, or housetop.

Now and then, when old Charlie, our cat, is away, I have had the pleasure of seeing half-a-dozen rooks at a time come down to my lawn to pick up the worms, or the crumbs I had thrown out to tempt them. These

rooks are uncommonly cautious, diplomatic birds. I notice that whenever there are six on the lawn, there is always a signalman perched up on a high branch of a neighbouring tree, and no sooner does a biped or quadruped approach within what his observant eye deems to be the radius of danger, than he gives a loud *caw-caw*, and off they go for a short time ; but if they happen to be hungry, and the worms or crumbs are plentiful, they are sure to return—first to the tallest trees, then, if the coast is clear, they drop down one by one and resume business, but always leaving one sentinel aloft.

I was startled one afternoon lately from a doze in the summer-house by a great screaming and caw-cawing in the apple trees. On looking up I found the noise was made by an impetuous, hungry young rook whose mother could not feed him fast enough. She had got one of my mellowest apples in her clutches and was pecking bits off it ; she ate none herself, but crammed the bits down her son's throat as fast as she could separate them, which was no easy task, for she had to clutch the apple with one foot and hold on to the branch with the other. I forgave her for stealing my apple on account of the motherly affection she was showing to her noisy and

greedy young son, who was strong enough to help himself.

As to the migration of certain birds there still seems to be a good deal of doubt amongst learned ornithologists ; my rooks certainly do not migrate very far. I have no idea whence they come or whither they go ; but they are constant visitors all the year round, and I have been surprised that they don't build and have a real home in the tall trees which surround my garden. I wish they would. I should like to compare notes as to the habits of these cockney rooks and those country ones I used to watch half-a-century ago. But my trees are poplars, and I have a notion that rooks don't like poplars for building purposes : their nests would be swung about too much in a strong wind.

Starlings bother me a good deal as to their comings and goings ; they seem to be here to-day and gone to-morrow all the year round, except, perhaps, in the spring, when they are less numerous, and I suppose many of them are off somewhere in the country about their nest-building business—at the very time I want them most, to help the sparrows to eat the nasty green grubs that devour the leaves of my gooseberry trees.

Sparrows, I am afraid, don't do much in

the spring by way of eating grubs to compensate for the damage they do to my gooseberry trees in the winter. If they would only eat the grubs now as industriously as they ate the fruit and leaf-buds in the winter, I could forgive them. On many of the trees the branches are bare of leaf and fruit just so far up as the twig would bear the weight of a sparrow, and the leaves and fruit are found only on the tips which they could not reach. Just now as I am writing I can see two of them in our best pear tree pegging away—they have nearly eaten a whole pear while I am looking on. On the whole, I think sparrows are a nuisance—they are as mischievous as they are impudent ; but I don't dislike them.

One Sunday in January, a very cold, frosty, and foggy afternoon, I noticed scores of starlings sitting in twos and threes on the top branches of the naked trees, their feathers ruffled up as if they were "a-cold," and occasionally uttering a low wailing note, subsiding into crooning little guttural songs. They seemed to have given up their business for the day as hopeless labour on the frozen ground ; but when I threw down a few handfuls of bread-crumbs, the lawn was soon alive with starlings and sparrows.

It is curious to see them at work ; there is no talking or chattering then—every one pecks away for himself, or steals a choice morsel from his neighbour. They seem to be proud of the society of the rooks, and sparrows are never so busy on the lawn as when the starlings are there ; then they seem to imagine themselves to be starlings too.

Of an evening, when their craws are full—and they take a deal of filling—they muster together on some tall trees and have friendly chats about our wicked old Charlie and the business and adventures of the day. They don't roost on the trees ; when their confabulation is over they start off somewhere else to bed, probably to some far-off fields in the country, where they were bred and born.

They are not imaginative birds ; a red rag is a red rag to them, and nothing more. My neighbour has hoisted a series of red rags on a long pole which reaches to the top of his mulberry tree, thinking thereby to scare the birds—but sparrows don't mind it, and as for starlings, there is one at this moment sitting on the top of the pole keeping guard whilst half-a-dozen others are in amongst the leaves, pegging away at the mulberries.

Now, as I am writing, there are three little

groups on the lawn—one old bird and three young ones in each group. The old one is pecking away in the grass, and the young ones following her with their beaks open, each one getting a worm in his turn. The young ones are quite as big and strong on the wing as the old ones, but I suppose their beaks are not yet sufficiently hardened to dig into the hard ground.

It has been a matter of surprise to me, that although at different times we are visited by so many birds, they never think of building their nests in the trees and bushes about our place. Once, indeed, a poor little pair of robins did build and hatch their young in the ivy under the eaves of the toolhouse—a safe and inaccessible place, one would have thought ; but our rascally old cat had his eye on them. I found out their nest by seeing them carrying in worms. Unluckily, Charlie saw them, too ; and when he thought the young ones were fat enough he scrambled up one night and made a meal of them, and cock robin as well, the old villain ! That is the only nest I have seen. I suppose cats are the cause.

Charlie is a very large and remarkably handsome cat, of a mild and benevolent aspect ; he is very popular amongst his fra-

ternity, consequently my garden has become the regular rendezvous of all the cats in the neighbourhood. Here come highly respectable, prudish-looking cats with little leather straps or ribbons and tinkling little bells round their necks, properly educated and genteel-looking, and here is also the favourite resort of many stray cats, wild and villainous, sneaking, lurching, evil-minded, thieving cats, whom nobody owns—poor, outcast, miserable starved wretches.

One of these I found last autumn beneath a broken glass shade under which she had crept, and there become the mother of two kittens. There we left her; we could not find it in our hearts to drive her away, so fondly did she tend her little helpless bantlings. She was perfectly wild and untamable. We used to put outside her nest a plate of bread and milk, which she immediately consumed when we were out of sight.

One morning, when the kittens were a month old, we found her stretched out dead, and the poor little orphans scrambling over her; they were so wild that we could not approach them. Goodness knows, we didn't want any more cats about the place, but we felt bound to feed these little motherless creatures. We could never catch them,

there are too many bushes about ; but they soon got in the way of coming out regularly morning and evening for their bread and milk, which they would lap on the sly, but never would they let us get near them. They were amusing, happy little things. One of them bore a striking resemblance to Charlie, the other favoured his mother. We were only allowed to see them at a distance ; the moment a footstep was heard they were out of sight. Charlie, who seems to have no paternal instincts, treated them with lordly contempt : they might die of starvation for aught he cared.

One wet and cold morning their bread and milk was unconsumed, and we found them in the bushes curled up, locked in each other's arms like the babes in the wood, both dead. I don't accuse our old gardener of having had any hand in the death of these innocents—I only know that he hates cats !

Well, with all these cats about, how can we expect birds to build in our bushes ? Charlie can climb like a squirrel, and the remains of many a starling and many a sparrow have I found about the paths.

Thus for a few weeks—sometimes but for a few days—in the early spring my town-surrounded garden looks charming and inviting ;

GRUBS ON GOOSEBERRY LEAVES. 73

then somehow there seems to come a blight upon all that is green—smoke from the surrounding chimneys and railway engines on all sides (for where can you find a place close to—

“The smoke and stir of this dim spot
That men call ‘London’”—

where steaming engines do not snort and whistle?); and “blacks” from the smut-laden atmosphere probably explain why the young green leaves begin so soon to shrivel and grow weak.

“God the first garden made,
And the first city, Cain.”

That, of course, means a country garden, which is free from this smoky blight; but I fancy that neither country nor town garden is free from another terror which besets my garden in the early spring. I mean the locust-swarm of young grubs which devour the leaves of my gooseberry and apple trees so soon as they are out. The golden laburnums and lilacs rarely retain their full beauty for more than three or four days; the leaves of the pink and white May trees are promptly consumed.

Last year I spent many an hour in what I then regarded as the needful but nasty opera-

tion of picking thousands of these little grubs off the gooseberry leaves, throwing them into a basin of salt and boiling water.

This spring I had begun, before they had made their appearance, to ask myself the question, What shall I do with the grubs that, from the curling leaves, I saw were coming. It was then by chance that I came across a little book which answered my question exactly by asking another rather startling one: *Why not eat them?*¹ Good heavens! Eat these slimy little beasts, the very sight of which, devouring my leaves, had created in me such a feeling of unutterable loathing!

I had salted and parboiled many a basinful of them with a grim feeling of revenge for the mischief they had wrought me; but *eat them!*—faugh!

I read this well-written, earnest, and amusing little pamphlet from beginning to end, and then I said, "Well! why not?"

"Them insects eat up every blessed green thing that do grow, and us farmers starves."

"Well, eat *them* and grow fat!"

These lines appear on the title-page of Mr. Holt's book. You see I had already unconsciously made some progress in this direc-

¹ "Why Not Eat Insects?" By Vincent M. Holt. London; Field and Tuer.

tion, having already cooked my grubs ; but this was last year, and Mr. Vincent Holt had not then enlightened me, therefore it never once occurred to me that the next best thing for me to do was to eat them ! Had I done so, I might have been ahead of Mr. Holt in springing a new delight upon the jaded appetite of the epicurean world. Like "that great lubberly boy, Bobo," the first who ever tasted "crackling," unable to restrain my delight at the savoury dish I had discovered, I might have been found rushing round my garden and my neighbours', seeking and picking all the grubs I could find !

Of all the "insects that are good to eat," I have the assurance of Mr. Holt that "the sawfly" (which, in its larval stage, is the hitherto despised creature that plays such havoc amongst the gooseberry bushes) is one of the "nicest to eat !" I shall bear this in mind !

Amongst the other insects strongly recommended by Mr. Holt as good for food are bees and wasps.

"From bees," he says, "we already derive a delicious sweet in the form of golden honey. From wasps we might, if we chose, derive an equally delicious savoury. What disciple of Izaak Walton, when he has been all the

morning enticing the wily trout with luscious wasp grubs baked to a turn, has not suspected a new and appetizing taste imparted to his midday meal of bread-and-cheese or sandwich? . . . At any rate, it will sometimes so happen to every fisherman to get the taste and smell of cooked wasp grubs with his meal, and I have never noticed that it in any way spoilt his appetite. Attracted by the said taste and smell, and having no prejudices against insect food, *I have myself spread the baked grubs upon my bread, and found their excellent flavour quite sufficient to account for the fondness of the trout for this particular bait.*"

The italics are mine, in order to emphasize the information for anglers during the coming wasp grub season. Wasps' nests, it may safely be predicted, will soon become as scarce and as precious as Chinese birds' nests!

When Mr. Holt's little book has been widely read and studied, the insect world will find that a new danger hangs over them. Let cockchafers and wireworms beware—beetle larvæ, sawflies, moths, and caterpillars, woodlice, bees, wasps, spiders, slugs, and snails, take heed! whether raw or cooked, you are all good for human food—for soups, curries, fricassées, nothing can surpass you!

With reference to our cat's slaughter of the robins mentioned in my last letter, a correspondent asks "Whether Charlie ate the whole of the cock robin?"

"The reason I ask is," he goes on to say, "that I have seen cats catch robins many times and oft, but they never devoured the whole bird, as they would sparrows, linnets, &c. In other cases, though they would catch they would not touch the bird, but simply leave it where it was slaughtered. For my part, I would sooner eat one sparrow than ten starlings, and to the cat there may be as much difference in the flavour of robins and sparrows as there is in sparrows and starlings to me. Well, sparrows roasted are delicious. From what I have noticed there is evidently something in a full-grown robin cats strongly object to; just as much as some of them like the hind legs of the common frog. This makes the circumstance mentioned the more remarkable, unless it was that Charlie had a stomach of steel."

My correspondent is altogether too literal in his interpretation of my words. I ought, perhaps, to have said that Charlie *slaughtered* those robins, for I saw their mangled remains afterwards. Charlie is a well-fed cat, and gets all the tit-bits of the house, so his massacre of these innocents was committed

not for want of food, but simply out of the ferocity of his feline nature.

It was a bit of original sin cropping out of him—had he given himself time to think, I am sure, knowing as I do his polished education and general amiability of manners, he would not have done it. If the murder had been committed by one of the many wolfish, starved cats that infest our garden, the crime might have been looked upon as justifiable avicide ; but for the sleek and glossy Charlie it was “worse than a crime—it was a fault.”

My correspondent seems to know a good deal about the likes and dislikes of cats ; their peculiarities of taste don't seem to be confined to the flavour of different birds, for it is said of cat-mint—

“If you set it, cats will eat it ;
If you sow it, cats won't know it !”

I never had the pleasure of tasting either sparrow or starling, so can express no opinion as to their comparative merits ; but according to Mr. Vincent Holt we have only to get rid of our early prejudices, and a new gastronomic world is opened up to us. Already we eat gooseberries—sawfly larvæ eat gooseberry-leaves ; sparrows eat larvæ—we eat sparrows. Why should we not eat larvæ ?

And, to follow up this chain of argument, cats eat sparrows—why shouldn't we eat cats? Really, there is no knowing whither Mr. Holt may not lead us! Frank Buckland has not gone quite so far as Mr. Holt, but he says that "a field-mouse is an excellent *bon bouche* for a hungry boy; it eats like a lark."





LETTER No. IX.

IN A SUBURBAN GARDEN

(continued).



NE Saturday afternoon at the end of May I noticed an old thrush and a young one sitting on the top branches of an acacia. The young one began fluttering its wings in a beseeching kind of way, which said plainly enough, "I want a worm, father!" Said the old one, "You sit there and watch me, and I will show you how to get one."

He then flew down to the lawn, and began picking; presently, after looking about to see that Charlie was out of the way and that he was not being watched, he plunged his head deep into the grass, and tugged away might and main, his wings spread out, his head down and his tail up by turns. It was a struggle betwixt our great Mother Earth on

the one hand, and this valiant little thrush on the other; the object of the fight was a worm. The "great globe itself" held its firm grip on one end of the worm; the thrush pulled away at the other, and at last came off conqueror. When he had fairly drawn out this long and wriggling prey, he killed it, laid it out flat on the grass, and began promptly to search about for another. Meanwhile the young thrush, excited no doubt by the battle he had witnessed from the tree, and in disobedience of the paternal command, flew down upon the grass and stood staring with open mouth at the active old bird, who on seeing his son came running back, and picking up the dead worm, put it into the young one's mouth, and it was at once swallowed. Worms seemed to be plentiful in the grass, perceptible to the parent bird's quick eye, although I could see none. When the young one had had enough, they both flew up into the trees, and began to clean their beaks by rubbing them on the branches. The young chap seemed to be quite as strong on the wing as his parent, though on the ground he was very stupid and ignorant, but he watched his progenitor's performances with an inquisitive eye; this seemed to be his first lesson in worm-hunting. I said

"father" just now, because I fancied this was the male bird from his dark colour and handsome slim proportions; the female I take to be a little more dumpy in form and lighter in colour.

Gilbert White tells us that the song thrush (*turdus simpliciter dictu*) begins to sing in February and sings on into August. If that is so, I hope to hear my thrushes for a few weeks yet, but I have noticed that for the last few days their song has been heard only very rarely; it has given place in a great measure to the cheery chirpy little *garden-warbler*, which has one or two notes almost as loud and clear as the thrush's; and for a week past he has exercised his vocal organs almost incessantly from four o'clock in the morning until late at night; but what a shy little fellow he is—he cannot bear to be looked at.

Birds are my garden pets; now for a few words about my garden nuisances—cats.

On two or three occasions during the past week, when all had retired to bed but myself, and while I was sitting in my library, I had heard a very feeble *squeak*. I made diligent search in every corner, and in the adjoining rooms, without discovering anything; at last I found a closet door, which on being moved

made a noise not very unlike the sound I had heard, so I concluded the squeak must be connected somehow with the door. The library door opens upon the lawn, and leaving it open I went out next morning for a stroll round the garden. When I returned, I heard a *miaul* under the table, and there I found a wretched brindled cat looking very fierce and inclined to be pugnacious ; it was one of the strays that haunt my garden, a friend of Charlie's. I was not sorry, when I opened the door, to see it dart off, for had I attempted a battle with closed doors I should certainly have come badly off : the brute was quite prepared for a spring at me. I drove her out of the garden and thought no more about her.

My daughter, who had been from home for ten days, went this morning to a cupboard in the library in which old newspapers are kept, and which so far as I know could not have been opened during the whole ten days of her absence, and there she found a litter of four kittens ! seemingly about a fortnight old and all alive and well ; theirs were the squeaks I had heard.

How the little creatures subsisted the whole of that time is a mystery. The mother could not have sneaked into the room except

on some such unusual occasion as that I have mentioned, and then she could not have opened the cupboard ; and yet these kittens after ten days' imprisonment were alive and well. Before I got home in the evening our housemaid had consigned them to a watery grave, and when I saw them they were floating dead in a pail of water, but looking plump and fat. All this evening, since I have been at home, the steps leading to the lawn have been haunted by that poor old mother, uttering now and again a most pitiful wail and looking the picture of unutterable woe ; when I have gone to drive her away, she has given me a look which says plainly enough, " O, you cruel, cruel, old man ! " Had I been at home before the young ones were all drowned, I am afraid I should have been tempted to leave her one alive. I could easily have slipped it over the wall into my neighbour's garden, where its grateful mother would quickly have followed ; but perhaps it is better as it is—those four innocents have been saved from a world of trouble—and I rather think my housemaid is laying plans, in conjunction with our gardener, by which it will not be their fault if the mother does not quickly follow them.

Certainly it must be admitted that a cup-

board in one's library is not exactly the place where one can feel any satisfaction in finding a brood of kittens belonging to a cat that does not belong to one's self; but, O Charlie! Charlie! you are the culprit again.





LETTER NO. X.

WOOD-PIGEONS, MAGPIES, AND ROOKS.

N the days that were earlier," probably about the time when the ape's tail began to grow "curlier," and long before a man or even a thumb had been evolved from him, there seemed to be a stirring of evolution in the slow-minded wood-pigeon (or quist, as we call him in our country), and he desired to improve the architecture of his dwelling ; so he besought the cunning magpie to give him a lesson in house-building.

"Pray tell me," said the quist, "the way in which you build your nest so strong and so fine."

"Well," said the magpie, "I don't mind instructing you if you will pay attention ; first, you place one stick so—" "I know," said the quist. "And then you put another across it so—" "I know," said the quist.

And then you put another crossways so—"
"I know," said the quist.

"Oh! very well," said the magpie, with a wicked oath which I won't repeat, "if you know already, why do you come to me? I'll teach you no more;" and away he flew.

In consequence of this conceited impatience of being taught, the quist to this day has never known how to build a nest properly.

I have generally found their nests in the forks of old apple trees or pollards, or in the midst of a very thick and ancient white-thorn, always fashioned in the same old primitive style, about a dozen twigs mixed up anyhow, and on these comfortless twigs the hen lays her two eggs and sits till she hatches them, whilst her mate sits up aloft singing—

"Coo-coo! how many eggs have you?"
and she replies—

"Coo-coo! I've only poor two!"

Now the magpie is really a splendid architect, and if the original quist had had sense enough and patience enough to take his lessons with less conceit and greater zeal and discretion, he would have had a more comfortable abode; and who knows what the consequence might have been? His wife might have produced more than the two eggs

to which the species seems now to be limited, and wood-pigeons might have become as plentiful as rooks. This would not indeed have been an unmixed blessing, for although pigeons when "baked in a pie" are good eating, and rooks are not (except when just fledged), they are far more destructive to crops than the too-much-abused rooks, for the latter always prefer worms and insects to seeds, while a quist will carry away in a day the weight of his own body in peas, or beans, or turnips.

There must be some other reason for the multiplicity of birds than the number of eggs they lay, for magpies, notwithstanding the magnificent nests they build, and the inaccessible places in which they build them, and although they lay at least half-a-dozen (sometimes eight) eggs, certainly do not increase in anything like the same ratio as pigeons.¹ It is true that, owing to their murderous and thieving propensities, they have made man

¹ Frank Buckland says that "the increase of wood-pigeons is due to the over-preservation of game. Hawks are shot down in order that pheasants may be preserved; the consequence is that the natural enemy of the wood-pigeon being destroyed, they at once increase in a ratio which could not take place if the hawks were allowed to continue their natural functions of keeping down their numbers."

their inveterate enemy, and they are ruthlessly destroyed whenever they can be caught. This will account, to some extent, for the comparative paucity of their numbers. With so many persistent enemies any other tribe of birds would long since have been exterminated, but the magpie knows how to take care of himself. Magpies generally build their nests in the topmost branches of the tallest trees they can find,¹ and many a time as a boy have I climbed to those giddy heights among the weak and slender boughs, frequently only to be disappointed.

When you get up to the nest it by no means follows that you can get your hand into it, for it has a broad and firm base nearly a yard in diameter, and it is strongly covered over with a crown of prickly thorns, the access being on one side only under this canopy, and with a perversity of cunning, as I used to think, that opening always happened to be on the side most difficult of approach. This was a point evidently well considered by the astute builders in laying the foundation. Now, if

¹ "A pair of magpies in a district where there were no trees made their nest in a gooseberry bush, and surrounded it with brambles, furze, &c., in so ingenious a manner that no one could get at the eggs without pulling the materials to pieces."—JESSE'S *Notes*, *White's Selborne*.

you cannot get your hand round to the opening it is better to give it up ; for what with the swaying of the small branches to which you are clinging and their tendency to snap, especially if they happen to be ash or pine, or even elm, there is a chance, if you attempt to twist yourself round to the opening, of your coming to the ground with more speed than you ascended, in which case your climbing in this world will be finished.

Rooks are very good builders, that is, they build good comfortable nests, strongly made and well lined with wool, but none of that diabolical cunning is exhibited about the rook's nest which you find in a magpie's. They are quite open to the sky above, and are rounder and more compact at the base, besides not being defended by prickly thorns, and although built on the tops of tall trees, they are far more accessible than the nest of the magpie.

I remember reading an amusing little article in the " St. James's Gazette," some months ago, on the subject of rooks building their nests, which reminded me of my boyish days, and the large rookery on the old farm. Many a time of an evening have I watched them coming home from all quarters, and hovering over the trees in such numbers that

the sky was darkened with the great black cloud.

I used to wonder why they could not go to bed quietly and at once without making such a clamour. I fancied that each bird had his own particular and favourite perch, and the great argument was to find it, or perhaps the late comers found their favourite perches occupied, and so made a diurnal disturbance about it.

The "St. James's Gazette" writer says that rooks don't really say *caw-caw*, although they are constantly trying to say it; the nearest they can get to it is *au-au*, or sometimes *awr-awr*. Very likely he is right; but then his rooks were suburban cockney rooks, and what cockney ever spoke his own mother-tongue correctly? Surely, if a cockney-man cannot help calling *raw, rawr*, it is excusable for a cockney rook to say *awr* when he means *caw*.

But my rooks live hundreds of miles away; they are country-bred gentlemen, and they speak their own language purely and without mincing affectation. I am certain that a well-bred country rook would never say *awr-awr* when he means to say *caw-caw*.

When I call my country rooks gentlemen, I must qualify the statement by admitting

that they are not a bit the less thieves and vagabonds than their cockney relations, and that they are as well inclined to tear each other's nests to pieces ; but with less excuse, for they live in the midst of woods where building material is abundant, and stealing from each other seems to be more bother and trouble than picking up twigs for themselves. But they do speak their traditional language very clearly and distinctly, *caw-caw*, and of course that dual word is only the key to their very extensive vocabulary. They have words of love and words of hate, words of cursing and words of swearing—words, too, of preaching and exhortation, and, as Gilbert White says: "in the breeding season they attempt sometimes, in the gaiety of their hearts, to sing, but with no great success." But at all times *caw-caw* is the root of their language.

I ought to know, for—

"When I was young, ah ! woful when !
Ah ! the change 'twixt now and then !"

many a time have I, at the peril of my neck, scrambled up from the shoulders of a companion to the first branch, and by gripping the tall trees with arms and knees, to the very tops amongst their nests, and then did I not hear the thousand *caw-caws* of the old ones fitting round me ? and I am certain

that nothing could be more distinct than their pronunciation of *caw-caw*.

Besides, have we not the authority of Thos. Ingoldsby on our side? If a daw says *caw*, surely a rook may do so. And who has not heard of the pious Jackdaw of Rheims?

"If anyone lied or if anyone swore,—

Or slumbered in prayer-time and happened to snore,

That good Jackdaw would give a great 'Caw!'

As much as to say, 'Don't do so any more!'"





LETTER No. XI. [1887.

A DAY WITH THE MAY FLY-FISHERS.

" In lowly dale, fast by a river's side,
With woody hill o'er hill encompassed round,

* * * * *

It was, I ween, a lovely spot of ground ;
And then a season atween June and May
Half-prankt with spring, with summer half-embrowned."
Castle of Indolence.

THE art of May Fly-fishing has in these latter days been elevated to a science. When I was young, all we had to do was first to catch our fly, fix him wriggling, and, if our dull senses could hear, screaming in agony on the hook, and cast him on the water, when up would come the unsophisticated, uneducated trout, seize his natural food with abounding confidence, and be pleasantly landed on the grass. There was no nosing about, no suspicious glance askant, no hesitating nibble—he saw, he came, and was conquered. Now, his mind

is sorely exercised ; he sees something floating on the top of the water which looks the very picture of a May Fly, but yet there is something strange and uncanny about it. He examines it with a critical eye ; sometimes he gives it a flap with his tail. Again he looks, he hesitates, he makes a half-hearted rush at it, feels a prick in the edge of his lip, and is off.

Monday last was my first experience of May Fly-fishing in these degenerate scientific days, and then I did not fish myself—I only went to look on. It was a lovely June day—in my youth the May Fly always used to come up in May—we were on a delightful stream, not 100 miles away from Canterbury. The clubmen were out in full force ; I saw seven of them in one pleasant meadow. They were not more than a hundred yards apart ; the May Fly came up splendidly, and the trout flopped up greedily after them. Each angler selected his own trout, and stuck to him steadily from morn to eve. It was a sight to see those enthusiastic anglers, each intent upon his own fish, and firm believer in the killing qualities of his own particular imitation of the natural fly, and its destructive power. How keenly they watched every rise of their particular trout ! How vigorously

would they swing their rods, half-a-dozen times or more, to get their insect perfectly dry and floatable, and then let him swim, wings erect, with the most delicate precision, just over the very centre of the ring made by the rising trout ! How tantalising, then, to see a real May Fly glide down over the same spot, and the big trout come straight at him, and scorn the scientific impostor ! Thus did these enthusiasts, single-handed and double-handed, swing their rods the livelong day ; they were perfect adepts in the art, and it was a real pleasure to see how cleverly they tried to deceive these cunning fish. Occasionally, to the disgust of the patient angler, a stupid roach would be beguiled ; but of the educated trout, what shall I say ? So far as I was able to ascertain, four good sizeable fish were the sole result of all this desperate striving, and one of these was blind of one eye ; these had all succumbed to the skill of one of these redoubtable anglers. This very remarkable want of success was, of course, quite unusual ; for these anglers were all men of experience, their arms were as accustomed to the swinging rod as the thresher to his flail, or Mr. Gladstone to his axe. Sometimes one would have a try at another man's fish during his temporary absence, in the vain hope of good-

naturedly triumphing over him (for the utmost cordiality and good nature prevailed amongst these experts), but to no purpose. Where one could not succeed, his friendly rival was sure to fail. I can hardly say how they explained to themselves their singular defeat. It could not be said that the trout were feeding on some other flies, because we had the evidence of our sight of the natural May Fly sailing down right into the mouths of these big trout. Here was the water in splendid order, a very gentle westerly breeze blowing, the May Fly abundant, and every man's own particular fish coming up and gorging himself sixty times an hour throughout the day, but always fighting shy of the angler's fly, laughing in his gills at him, winking at him with one eye shut, and saying : " Don't you wish you could catch me ? " I fancy there must be among them a sentinel fish, whose duty it is to sail up and down the stream, crying, " Look out to-day ! There are seven of 'em all of a heap ; keep your weather-eye open ! " ¹ At the finish, these seven fishermen, having nothing else to boast of, boasted of the number

¹ Izaak Walton tells us of carp or bream that whilst " most of them are seeking food at the bottom, yet one or two will lie on the top of the water, rolling and tumbling themselves whilst the rest are under him at the bottom ; and so you shall perceive him to keep centinel. "

of times the fish "came short" at them, and deplored the ill-luck which rendered their striking ineffectual, and how they ought to have caught so many brace, but didn't. They vowed to come again to-morrow and have it out with these knowing fish, not a man of them in the least disheartened. I hope they had better luck on the morrow, but I was not there to see.

I enjoyed the pleasant stroll as only one can who so rarely finds the opportunity. I occupied myself for some time in witnessing the birth, life, and death of a single May Fly. I am not an entomologist, so I cannot tell the average period of the life of a May Fly. The particular one I took note of struggled up to a new life from the bottom to the surface of the water, shook himself free of his watery shroud, spread out his wings, and fluttered to fly; but I suppose, in the first exuberance of his newborn existence, he was too eager. His fragile wings got wet and heavy; he could only lift himself two or three inches from the surface of the water, and then fall back. I followed him down the placid stream for a quarter of a mile or more; he struggled hard for some time, but at length lay flat. He seemed to have quite given over the fight for existence, and I

thought he was drowned ; but presently the stream landed him on the leaf of a water-weed.

I noticed that a yard before that floating lifeboat was reached he showed renewed energy, as though conscious that relief was at hand, and he was to have another fight for the bright and beautiful world he had as yet only caught a glimpse of. Landed on the leaf, he fluttered his wings, which soon dried in the hot sun. At length he floated joyously upward, singing, I am sure, as merrily as any lark, if one could but have heard him. I know, of course, that there are insects much smaller than he—the mosquito, for example, whose piercing little song can make itself heard to the terror of a regiment of soldiers—and it by no means follows because we cannot hear it that the delicate, airy May Fly does not possess an organ too refined to reach human ears. But, alas ! if he was singing, his song was soon cut short. Not ten yards had he floated away down stream when an envious sand-martin came dashing up, and his song and his life were ended. Thus, ere sin could touch or sorrow blight this young May Fly, was his brief life closed in the crop of a sand-martin !

May Flies, like men, seem to be born to

trouble, but some have more of it than others. I dare say, while under the water, from the time when the egg falls from the surface to the bottom, and through the various stages of their aquatic existence, their life is tranquil enough. It is when they come to the surface that their fate is varied like that of mortal men. Some, like the fly whose tragic history I have tried to tell, meet with nothing but trouble and sorrow from the cradle to the grave ; while others seem to be born into the very exuberance of light and life and song, dancing and singing in the sun their life-long day.





LETTER No. XII. [1887.

THE MAY FLY.



WRITING last week on the subject of the May Fly, I remarked that, as I am not an entomologist, I could not tell the average length of its life. I suggested "its life-long day;" but I was unaware that this is still a matter of doubt. Since then I have consulted two or three learned authorities; but it seems to be a point on which the learned are not agreed, and May Flies are said to be unsatisfactory insects from a collector's point of view on account of their extreme fragility. Aristotle, speaking of ephemera in general, and apparently with special reference to May Flies, says: "On the river Hypanis, which flows into the Bosphorus, may be seen in the sunshine chrysales, which, in breaking from their encasement, give birth to an animal furnished with four wings and four legs. These beings

live and fly, grow weak as the sun inclines towards the west, and die when it sets." The learned M. Pictet says that the insect is furnished with six legs, Aristotle having mistaken their fore-legs for antennæ. R. McLachlan says : "These insects (May Flies) are more attended to by the angler than by the entomologist, and much poetry has been written on the taken-for-granted supposition that the romance of their few hours of existence is founded on fact. Possibly, however, some few only live a day or two as perfect insects ; but these are exceptions. . . . The males of some species dance in swarms over the streams ; whereas the females are only to be found among the herbage or taking short flights. . . . Some species are so abundant as to be used for manure, and even for feeding pigs (!) on Continental rivers."

Mr. McLachlan, however, does not tell us how long May Flies really do live. It seems to me that, whether their life above water lasts for hours or days, their true life lies below ; there they live, toil, and perform all the drudgery of existence ; and when they come up endowed with gauzy, temporary, ephemeral wings, it is, in fact, only to get married ; their nuptials are performed in the air, and whether their honeymoon lasts for a day or a week,

or is cut short in an hour by the swinging swift or darting swallow or hungry trout, it is soon over; their hours in the air are few, their life below is comparatively long.

I think myself fortunate, being absent from town and from any library, in having access to this superb work, "Histoire Naturelle des Insectes Néuroptères." Par F. J. Pictet. Genève, 1843. The work is illustrated with the most exquisite engravings of insects I have ever seen. I also happen to have before me a volume of Buffon, "Histoire Naturelle des Insectes, Névroptères." Par M. P. Rambur. Having no English work to refer to except the little pamphlet by Mr. McLachlan, "Instructions for the Collection and Preservation of Neuropterous Insects," I make no apology for translating a few passages bearing on the subject of the May Fly (*Ephemera vulgata*) from these works.

Pictet's account of the birth, life, and death of a May Fly is very interesting. He says: "The female flutters just above the water, and there lets fall one or two little groups of eggs which absorb the water and sink to the bottom. The eggs are completely abandoned to chance, and one does not see, among the Ephémèrines, the instinct so remarkable with some Phryganidæ, which,

although insects of the air, go to the bottom of the water to choose a place convenient to lay their eggs, sacrificing thus their own lives for the safety of their posterity. For the rest, the ephemera does not gain much by its maternal indifference, for it does not survive the egg-laying, and the two sexes die always very promptly when their *rôle* is finished."

"This extreme brevity of life," continues Pictet, is one of the characteristics of this family which has most struck ancient observers, and it is worth saying a few words about. In the ordinary state of things, the same day, as Linnæus says, includes for the ephemera, its birth, its creation of a new family, and its death; often even half a day, sometimes a few hours, suffice for that.

In the summer days one sees these insects shake off their envelope towards three o'clock in the afternoon, fly upwards for a few hours, couple, lay, and die when the sun disappears below the horizon. Still, it is not necessary to believe that this brevity of life is the result of the organization of the ephemera. These insects, and it is a fact already recognized by M. de Geer, can be made to live many days, and for that it is only necessary to prevent reproduction. If at the moment of its birth one takes an ephemera and shuts it up alone,

it can be made to live for eight days ; but in its natural state it cannot resist the fatigue of egg-producing.

Rambur tells us that matrimonial arrangements being completed, " the female deposits her eggs simply on the water or on submerged plants, holding herself a little above, and by a quick movement, or else by settling on the plant and plunging her abdomen into the water. She appears to drop her eggs separately, but as they are sometimes found in masses they must also be thus deposited. The number of eggs must be very considerable, and in some species may be estimated at many thousands. The larvæ would appear to remain about a year to acquire their full growth. The appearance of the perfect insect varies much according to the species. Some are met with throughout the summer season."

Pictet says : " It is difficult to form precise ideas as to the time which passes from the birth of the larvæ to their metamorphosis. Swammerdam gives to the larvæ of the *Palingenia longicauda* a duration of three years, and Réaumur thinks that those of the *Palingenia virgo* live two years. I have not been able to make direct observation on this subject, because the larvæ of the *Ephemera*

vulgata, the only ones I have been able to observe in this division, are very difficult to keep for a long time, and I have only been able to preserve them for a few months."

Concerning the manners and customs of these *Ephemeridæ* during their subaqueous existence, it is very interesting to learn from Pictet, in relation to the metamorphoses of these insects, that there are great differences between the species. Some, long and cylindrical, armed with strong and trenchant claws, can dig out galleries for themselves in the earth. Others, large and fat, are incapable of digging, live always in the open water attached to stones, and are easily caught. Others, again, thin and delicate, are supplied in their pliant tail with an instrument for swimming, and these find retreats in mosses and aquatic grasses. Besides these, there are others still more feeble, and the latter, being unprovided with the means of swimming, lie in ambush, and seize their prey by strategy.

The larvæ of the *Ephemera* and the *Palin-genia* have very marked differences in the form of their mandibles and respiratory organs, but they have also many similarities; both are long, subcylindrical, with a small pointed head. They seek standing waters,

or those parts of the rivers where the current is least strong. Although these larvæ are poorly provided with the means of swimming, they can manage by serpent-like movements to make fairly rapid progress ; but their short legs and long bodies make it difficult for them to stop when the current draws them. The water rolls them over and carries them off, unless they can manage to attach themselves to a stone to resist its action.

The first care of the young larvæ is to construct a house. These retreats consist of tubular galleries, straight or slightly curved and horizontal, dug out of the clay or mud. They dig with their mandibles and fore-feet. The diameter of the tube is a little larger than that of their body, but nevertheless not sufficient for them to attain their full growth. As they grow they change their galleries, which are generally very slight and of little durability. In some places even the movement of the water obliges them to change more often still, for they do not like to be far from the surface ; still, they must be in the water. When the river has a variable height, these insects have to change their habitation frequently. Thus the turning on and off the water for a mill stream must be a source of great trouble and inconvenience to these little

workers, never for a moment taken into account by the miller.

A correspondent attributes our want of success to the extraordinary hatch this season. He says :—

“To this wonderful—I might almost say abnormal—profusion is due, I think, the disappointment of this year’s May Fly-fishing. The trout were literally crammed with the pupæ, which they took as they rose to the surface of the water to assume the sub-imago state (this I proved by examination), and the fish so gorged were extremely fanciful and capricious in taking the fly in its mature or sub-imago condition, and when they did so, rose lazily, repeatedly missing the fly.

“In taking the artificial fly the same capriciousness and laziness continued. I found the best time was at the commencement of the hatch, when few flies were on the water. At one time none but floating flies would take ; at another none but drowned flies. Such was my experience. For example : On Saturday, June 11, in the morning the drowned fly prevailed—in the afternoon only the floating fly ; on Saturday, June 18, the drowned fly took all day, the floating fly being useless, and both were fairly tried.

“The fly last week was literally in myriads, and the heaps of the dead were in such quantities that where they accumulated a very unpleasant odour prevailed.”



LETTER No. XIII. [1887.

JUBILEE FLY-FISHING.

"Some better pleased with private sport,
Use tennis ; some a mistress court ;
But these delights I neither wish,
Nor envy, while I freely fish."

IZAAB WALTON.



HEN fools go a-shooting, wise men go a-fishing ;" so says Charles Kingsley, or, rather, so says "Old Marks." Just now, while I am writing, a good deal of Jubilee powder is being blazed away, and to-morrow—the grand day—there will be a good deal more. I hope I am as loyal as most people, but circumstances have prevented my joining in any Jubilee festivities. I am not, on that account, going to assert that shooting off blank cartridges is not as wise a way of proving one's loyalty as going a-fishing. As a rule I should agree with "Old Marks" to the extent that angling

is preferable to shooting, but not in Jubilee days. I have consoled rather than prided myself on superior wisdom, by roaming beside a beautiful river.

I am not aware of the doings of other fishermen on other rivers during the late May Fly season, but on our stream I think I may say that, on the whole, the season has been a failure.

Four days out of the six working days of last week we journeyed, Piscator and I, forty miles a day from our seaside resort in the hope of retrieving in some measure our bad fortune of the previous week, when the May Fly were in full feather, and the big trout gorging themselves with them, but refusing to look at our superb imitations. Be it known, however, that I did not carry a rod (not being a member)—the Angler's Club rules forbid that; I carried the basket! I acted as a sort of shadow, or, let me say, a "boy," to Piscator; so when I say *we*, you will clearly understand what "we" means.

On Monday, Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday we made these long excursions; but almost in vain. On the first day the May Fly was still on in considerable numbers, and we accounted for our want of success by assuming that the trout were

occupied in digesting their last week's feast of green and yellow "drakes." The wind was easterly, but I was told that an easterly wind was good for this stream. It has been easterly ever since, and getting stronger and colder on every visit.

When I go a-fishing again I shall remember the good aspiration of our venerable master, and trust that I may not have an east wind! It may be good for the fish, but it certainly is not pleasant for the fisherman. Quite apart from our chance of catching fish, a strong, biting, easterly wind considerably lessens the pleasure of being on the banks of a charming river in the leafy month of June.

Generally, by the time the sun had disappeared behind the distant hills, the wind would subside to a gentle lullaby, and then occasionally, and by earnest watching, we might see here and yonder a solitary rise; but few and far between they were, and our train left our station—a mile off—at nine o'clock, so that our only hopes lay in that precious half-hour between sun-down and time to start for the train! Then, when our flagging spirits began to rise with these few rising fish, down would come shoals of weeds which had been cut in the upper meadows,

or the miller above would turn the water off for his mill-stream, and our river would suddenly sink a foot or two, and the rising trout with it.

But despite these troubles, up to the very last moment the train would give us we hopefully fished on. Our chance (and for the last half-hour on Saturday night we really thought we had a chance) was swamped by some urchins on the opposite side, who amused themselves by throwing stones, and by villagers bobbing for eels in the cream of the water. Beyond an occasional decent fish, and the catching and returning of one or two under the thirteen-inch limit, our excursions last week were fruitless. True, we did not begin fishing until after five o'clock.

The conclusion we have come to, Piscator and I, is, that noted as this charming stream is for big trout, it is not very well stocked with them ; for one trout that we saw, there were shoals of big 1 lb. and 2 lb. roach, such as would delight the heart of a London or Sheffield club angler. They were easy enough to catch, and when hooked on a light fly-rod would now and then fight well ; but we did not want them—we could only be content with big trout. Anything shorter than 13 in.

has, by a law of the Medes and Persians who preserve this water, to be returned to its native element, in order that it may enjoy its liberty for another year, and grow bigger.

I fancy we made a sort of personal acquaintance with nearly every one of the big trout in the club water. We know their haunts—we spotted them; and some day, when wind and weather are more propitious, we mean to have at least a few of 'em. We—that is, Piscator and I—are not the sort of fishermen to acknowledge ourselves beaten; my old shoulders are still stout enough to carry a heavyish basket. Our holidays are too brief for us to neglect our precious opportunities, so we mean to come again.

For the benefit of a rising generation we have been obliged to make our headquarters at a very popular, if not a very fashionable, seaside resort, and our off days are spent with spades and buckets on the sands. These are our penitential days, days of propitiation offered to the female portion of our small community. Not for a moment would I have them think I do not thoroughly enjoy making mountains and castles and moats on the sand for my grandchildren; but, apart

from this enjoyment, I am bound to say that I have a positive aversion to loafing about or lying flat on the sands for hours, as I see multitudes of my species doing.

I think I would almost rather take to "beer and skittles" for my holiday entertainment, than to such a way of passing the time. It is true, nevertheless, that on our sands there are not wanting abundant sources of amusement for those who have the spirit and pluck to enjoy them ; there are ponies and donkeys, nigger minstrels, archery targets, cocoanuts to be won by bowling at them ; and then our town boasts of a menagerie, "the finest collection of animals out of London," says the announcement.

In earlier days I used sometimes to take my young folk to the Zoological Gardens in Regent's Park. There everything seemed gay and joyous ; there was no sense of imprisonment and captivity. The animals were cheerful and happy, and were as well pleased to see us as we were to see them. What a melancholy contrast does this collection of *fera natura* present to us ! I took my grandchildren to see the garden. We were but a small party, and we were alone with the wild beasts. It was truly depressing to see those solitary birds and beasts caged up

in ramshackle cages, half-starved, filthy, and malodorous.

An eagle and a vulture, caged together, treated us with scornful contempt; a polar bear swung his melancholy head like a pendulum, as if wound up by internal machinery and could not stop till his clockwork had run down. There was a real white elephant, made white by rubbing himself against his newly-whitewashed walls. Large and splendid lions and tigers, weary of the heartless, hopeless life they were doomed to live, lay sleeping on their floors, sometimes lazily lifting an eyelid and closing it again as expressive of their supreme scorn of the human race.

Even the monkeys were not lively; but the saddest, cruellest sight of all, was that of a noble hound shut up in a miserable cage with a mangy wolf. How that beautiful dog barked and howled, and, as we approached, begged, entreated, implored us to let him out of that accursed cage, and away from his villainous companion; one could not help wondering what business he had "*dans cette galère?*" What crime could he have committed that he should be doomed to such a prison and such foul companionship? It was not easy to feel sympathy for the imprisoned

wolf—he looks as if he deserved his fate ; but one could have shed tears for that poor captive dog. He was the only animal in the large assemblage that seemed to have spirit enough left in him to utter a sound ; all else were silent as the grave. The inharmonious couple may have been, doubtless were, intended to realize the Apocalyptic vision of the lion and the lamb lying down together.

There are many other attractions besides birds and beasts in these grounds. There are swings, merry-go-rounds, and shooting galleries ; the finest show of waxwork in the world, dioramas of the siege of Paris, &c. We left all these delights with a feeling of sadness that we had enjoyed them all by ourselves—there were none to share our enthusiasm.

Then, again, we have our noble jetty, and the ruling passion being still strong in us, we fished from that jetty. From fly-fishing for trout in a meadow to fishing for dabs and catching only crabs from the lower steps of a jetty, what a descent it is ! The one is sublime, the other is truly ridiculous ; and yet there are many enthusiasts who spend all their precious time here fishing for dabs.

To-morrow is Jubilee day. I wonder whether it will be considered loyal to go a-fishing on

Jubilee day. I think we must risk it. We have done what we could to show how loyal we are : we have bought a superb banner, bearing, not the strange device "Excelsior," but the familiar words, "God Save the Queen—Long Live the Empress," and suspended it from the drawing-room window of our house by the sea, and as the worshipful mayor has not invited us to dine with him, we shall take train early in the morning, and once more, and for the last time for many a day, try our hands at those cunning trout. The wind, alas ! far from being variable, seems to have taken up permanent quarters a trifle north of east, so that we are rather hopeful than sanguine of success. If anything comes of this last excursion it shall be reported. Anyhow, I can assure myself of this consolation—that it is pleasanter to have the east wind blowing into and all round you, over a green and yellow buttercupped meadow than round the corners of dusty streets. I would rather recline

"Beneath the milk-white thorn
That scents the evening gale,"

and listen to the birds in the bushes and the skylarks overhead, and the cuckoo far away, than listen to any German band or negro minstrel that haunts the sandy shore.

" Oh, cuckoo ! shall I call the bird,
Or but a wandering voice ?
While I am lying on the grass
Thy loud note smites my ear !
From hill to hill it seems to pass,
At once far off and near."

With reference to the cuckoo, the old saw
used to run—

" The cuckoo sings in April,
The cuckoo sings in May,
The cuckoo sings in July,
But only on the day."

Gilbert White says he is first heard about April 7, and last on June 28. Bewick says, "The well-known cry of the male is commonly heard about the middle of April, and ceases at the end of June."

P.S.—I regret to conclude this letter by saying that circumstances were too strong for us. We did not go a-fishing on Jubilee day.





TWO MORE DAYS ON A FARM.

LETTER No. XIV. [1887.

AN AFTERNOON WITH THE RABBITS.



HAVE been staying for a day or two at a farmhouse, not so far away from the metropolis as to prevent our seeing the lightning and hearing the distant roll of the thunderstorm which burst over London last week, while we ourselves were high and dry, our meadows and our turnips hungering and thirsting for the rain which seemed to be falling all round, but which never came near us.

Our farm stands high, and looks down over the Thames valley; the towers of Windsor form a fine picture in the background. Not a drop of rain has visited this farm for many weeks, so there are no crops to speak of, and the harvest, such as it was, was soon gathered in. Nevertheless, in a picturesque sense, it is a charming place.

Turnips and mangolds are few ; but rabbits and hares abound. When I tell you that with thirty cartridges my young host killed twenty-eight rabbits one morning as they ran out of the wheat before the reaping-machine, no better proof of their abundance could be given, and he may reasonably claim to be regarded as a good shot. There is no fishing in this neighbourhood, so one day we went a-rabbiting ; Venator with his gun, I with my walking-stick, Joyce with a brace of ferrets and two terriers, Spot and Vick. Vick is not much larger than a rabbit, and can wriggle a long way into a moderate-sized burrow ; she is, however, not so easily extracted ; Joyce had to pull her out by the tail.

Following the hedgerows, Spot soon marked a rabbit, and Vick gave tongue in the bush ; out came the rabbit, bang went the gun, number one was bagged ; and so the game went on. At length a rabbit popped out and into a hole too quickly for a shot. Now it was Bob, the ferret's, turn—a dark, savage little brute, whom none but Joyce could venture to handle, and he only with a stout glove.

I was becoming excited with the sport. My scruples about killing a rabbit were

easily overcome by the surrounding evidence of the damage they had wrought for the farmer. I vow I had not fired a gun for forty years. Venator handed me his breech-loader. Without a licence, I boldly seized the weapon. I felt that sort of trepidation which is said to creep through the nerves of an African hunter within range of a lion on his path, as I breathlessly watched that little rabbit hole.

Joyce was sitting at a distance, a dog under each arm, and for fear of accident Venator stood close behind me. For ten long minutes we all intently watched. Spot and Vick, with eager eyes and ears pointing forward, could scarcely be restrained. I was outwardly calm and firm as a rock, while inwardly I trembled like a leaf moved by the breeze. I knew not what might happen. Suppose by some strange twist I should shoot Joyce, or Venator, or the dogs, or myself! I conjured up all manner of terrible possibilities, or I thought of what had chanced to many a wild sportsman before me. I was just trying to decide how I should act supposing the rabbit were to run between the legs of the mistress's favourite old Alderney cow, which was quietly browsing not far away, when all of a sudden out comes poor

bunny, with a tremendous dash, making straight for the cow. In an instant, and just like the bold lion-hunter aforesaid, my nerves became perfectly calm. I took a steady, deliberate aim : I fired, and, to my astonishment, bunny rolled over on the grass—dead as a doormat ! I felt like a murderer.

This was triumph enough for one day ; no more shooting for me. I returned the gun to Venator. To say nothing of my moral scruples, I did not want to endanger the good impression I must have made on Joyce's mind by this efficient display of sportsmanship.

Then we had trouble in getting Bob, the ferret, out ; he would come to the mouth of the hole and sniff round, wondering what had become of the rabbit, and then rush back again. Joyce, who is full of expedients, and understands and delights in this sort of thing, threw the dead rabbit into the hole, and squealed just like a live one ; out comes Bob, seizes the rabbit ; Joyce seizes Bob, and bags him.

Subsequently two rabbits took refuge in one hole ; Bob was put in after them. He managed to kill one, suck his blood, and then no doubt he rolled himself up comfortably for a nap. Spade and pick-axe had to be fetched.

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It was a sight to see Joyce thrashing away with pick and spade, smashing the rocks, and tearing up the roots with his hands, throwing himself down at full length, and thrusting his arm into the hole; he could touch fur, but could not get hold. Up again, with spade and pick, (the latter he broke in his desperate energy,) till at last, after an hour's almost superhuman toil, he drew forth, first, the dead rabbit, with the ferret hanging on by his teeth, and then, from another corner, a live one quite uninjured. We gave him a chance for his life; but it was a poor chance—Venator's aim is too deadly.

We finished by running another bunny into his hole under a bush; the active Joyce was down at full length, and in a jiffy drew the rabbit out, at the same time disturbing the calm repose of a wasps' nest just above the hole. Joyce got a "kick" in the arm; but what cared he? He drew out the dagger like a hero, and thought nothing of it.

You have all been invited in your time to the Grasshopper's Feast and the Butterfly's Ball, and I hope none of you have forgotten those festivities. I have to offer you an evening party with hornets—an occasion on which Joyce's heroism was even more conspicuous.



AN EVENING WITH THE HORNETS.

LÉTTER No. XV. [1887.

"O, it is excellent to have a giant's strength,
But it is tyrannous to use it like a giant."

SHAKESPEARE.



HE hornet, so called from its *antennæ*, or horns, is only a big wasp. As Chang, the giant, is to an ordinary Chinaman, so is *Vespa crabro* to *Vespa vulgaris*. It builds in decaying hollow trees, under the eaves of barns, &c. Its nest is composed of coarser materials than that of the wasp (*Vespa vulgaris*). Gilbert White says that wasps make their nests with the raspings of sound timber; hornets with what they gnaw from decayed bark. These particles of wood are kneaded up with a mixture of saliva from their bodies, and moulded into combs. Réaumur asserts that the hornet uses the bark of living trees; but Kirby and Spence say

decayed wood. If the hole in the tree is not large enough the insects gnaw the sides of the interior. The *antennæ* of the male are curiously notched on the outside.

The children were playing under a large elm on the lawn, when I noticed a number of hornets busily at work on the interstices of the bark, or flitting and buzzing round the tree, and I got them away with all speed. We napped one or two of the insects with a board. Shortly afterwards, unnoticed by anyone, Toddles, a three-year-old, started off to the tree by himself, with his seaside paddle, and banged away at the hornets, shouting, "Me kill de nasty hornets, too!"

I was terrified, but I scrambled up the little bank at the foot of the tree, and carried the child off with half-a-dozen hornets buzzing round us; being cowardly, they did not venture to attack us. If they did but know the immense power they wield, who could withstand them? Certain it is that they possess "a giant's strength," and it is creditable to them that they do not "use it like a giant." Scripture tells us that the hornet was employed "to drive out the Hivite, the Canaanite, and the Hittite." I am not sure, after all, that cowardice is the real cause of their forbearance; their dagger is their life. They

know that when they have given the fatal stab their own life is forfeited. I have often heard this said of wasps, and yet the pugnacious wasp is ever ready with his sting. He seems to think nothing of his latter end. Shakespeare says of the humble-bee:—

“ Full merrily the humble-bee doth sing,
Till he hath lost his honey and his sting ;
And being once subdued in armed tail,
Sweet honey and sweet notes together fail.”

Troilus and Cressida.

And Sir John Lubbock of the bees:—
“ Though bees which have stung and lost
their sting always perish, they do not die immediately, and in the meantime they show little sign of suffering from the terrible injury.”

Possibly in stinging hornets suffer as much pain as they give ; that, however, is only surmise. Anyway, it is not nice to have them in one's garden for children to play with.

I watched them, and seeing one strike a bee-line, I followed ; but he only flew a hundred yards away to a neighbouring lime tree in the orchard, under which the children were used to play.

The body of this lime from the ground up to the branches was alive with hornets. I suppose they were after the sweet gum that

exudes from the bark ; or it may be that they were still engaged in building operations, and were carrying away bits of bark with this object, as Réaumur suggests. They seemed to be spiteful enough to each other ; when one found a choice morsel, another would be down upon and clutch him ; both would then tumble clumsily to the ground.

The victor would rise first, and with his prize, whatever it was, in his strong mandibles, would make a line (I felt sure now) for home, and I resolved to find out where this home was, and discover, if possible, with what material it was built.

Away he went, mounting high in the clear sky, over shed and barn, stack and tree. He was soon followed by one and another. I saw that this was a grand highway—a regular train going and coming always in the same direction—for when one would occasionally make a circuit round the trees, as if to deceive me, he was sure to come out 'twixt barn and sky on the same track.

I started off beyond shed, and barn, and stackyard, away down to a large pond surrounded by a coppice. I had not long to watch there before I saw these winged soldiers high up in the air above the barn, and, one by one, down they came towards the

corner where I was standing. I had spotted them so far pretty accurately. Now to find their nest.

In the corner of the meadow, just over the fence, are three pollard willows. In the head of one of these I soon observed a big hole, in and out of which a constant stream of hornets passed. The bulk of them seemed to come from the orchard; but some arrived from the opposite direction. One of the orchard hornets recognized me, I feel sure; he came buzzing about my head unpleasantly, as much as to say, "Go away, naughty old man! I am sure you are up to no good, and this is dangerous ground!"

I had tracked them home. They had selected their domicile with remarkable defensive instinct against attack from their natural enemy—man. Three sides of the little corner on which the tree stands is surrounded by a moat full of water 6 feet deep and 10 feet wide; the fourth side is formed by the tall park paling, over which I was looking at them. This little island of about thirty yards in circumference would have been practically unapproachable, but for some posts and rails, which made an insecure passage at one end.

It is a curious fact that not one man about

the farm had ever taken, or seen taken, a hornets' nest. "Waspy's" nests they had often taken, but never a hornets'. I had to teach them. I took council with Joyce, who is an apt scholar.

As a boy, I had assisted at the storming of many a hornets' castle. We knew them to be, or at all events we acted in the full belief that they were, arrant cowards. Half-a-dozen boys would stand round the tree with a long leafy branch in one hand and a bat in the other, and swish or nap them down as they approached the hole, and when we had sufficiently thinned the outsiders and scared those inside, a kettle of boiling water poured into the hole finished their business. We never attempted to get at the comb.

Never do I remember any boy being stung ; yet we took no trouble to cover ourselves, and we were all aware of the popular tradition that "nine hornets can kill a horse."

This time we did not adopt so foolhardy a plan ; indeed, the situation did not admit of it, for there was no room for a run, and I have been followed by a hornet for a quarter of a mile, swishing and batting all the time. I am sure he could easily have stung me if he had wished. My opinion now is that he was only amusing himself by frightening me.

Certain it is that hornets are the most magnanimous of insects, or else the most cowardly.

Mr. Smee ("My Garden") says: "Dr. Ormerod mentions the case of a country-woman who patronized hornets because they rid her rooms of flies whilst she was confined to bed."

We all looked upon this proposed attack of ours as a very serious business indeed; the female portion of our community entreated us to let the wicked things alone, and not go near them. Nothing but the risk the children ran in the garden would have induced them to consent to the risk to our precious selves down in the corner of the meadow.

We provided ourselves with some coarse rock powder; this we moistened with saliva and formed into a cake the size of a hen's egg; a wooden skewer was stuck into the thick end of it, the other end was dusted over with dry powder, and our torpedo was complete.

On the previous night I had watched the premises till a quarter past eight, which was as late as I could see; but still they were hard at work going and coming, and I wondered if they meant to work all night.

We decided, however, to commence the

siege at half-past eight ; by that time it was as dark as it was likely to be for some hours, for the young moon, a day old, was shining as brightly as it could be expected to do at that early age.

We did not like to put a ladder against the tree for fear of arousing the sentry. We found a rotten old pair of painter's steps, and this Harris, our bailiff, trailed down to the island ; it was heavy and lumbering, and he had to scramble along the shaky posts and rails. When he was half-way across, the two parts of the steps separated, one piece falling into the water with a great splash, which certainly disturbed the sentry and some of the guard, for there was much buzzing about afterwards. Therefore, I presume, they possess the sense of hearing, which has been questioned as regards bees and ants. Thus, after all, we had to place the steps against the tree as gently as it could be done.

Joyce was the hero of the occasion. He put on a thick pair of leather gloves, and I tied the cuffs of his coat over them ; then I covered his head and shoulders with a thin white gauze, which he could see through. Thus equipped, he cautiously mounted the steps to inspect, and as quickly descended, for there, at the mouth of the hole, was a

whole regiment of soldiers on guard, wide awake, with their formidable weapons in readiness.¹ There was also a considerable buzzing about overhead ; the stragglers were not all in even yet.

We decided to postpone the attack for half an hour, and meanwhile go into the wood and take the wasps' nest in which Joyce had come to grief that afternoon.

Another and smaller squib was soon made and applied to the hole ; it was satisfactory to find that this acted splendidly—a good omen for the hornets' torpedo. A turf was quickly and firmly fixed on the hole ; we gave the "waspy" a little time to suffocate comfortably, and then Joyce set to work with his usual vigour to dig out the nest. But he was beaten this time ; the roots were so thick, and the rock so immovable, that he had to give it up.

We were a party of four, and if Joyce looked like a ghost when he mounted the

¹ "If a nest of wasps be approached without alarming the inhabitants, and all communication be suddenly cut off between those out of the nest and those within it, no provocation will induce the former to defend it and themselves. But if one escapes from within, it comes with a very different temper, and appears commissioned to avenge public wrongs, and prepared to sacrifice its life in the execution of its orders."—*Kirby and Spence*.

sally tree, we all now looked like robbers or murderers in the midst of a wood, with dark lantern, pick, and spade, digging a grave in which to bury a dead body, the pale moon shining on the lake below us.

Now we made another attack on the strong fortress on the island. Joyce sprang over the fence like a young antelope, and Harris followed with lantern and matches. Joyce was soon equipped again in his headgear and gloves. With squib in one hand and turf in the other, he mounted the ladder, while Harris, barefaced, barehanded, and cool as a cucumber, held the lantern up, struck a match, and applied it to the end of Joyce's squib. It fizzed splendidly. Joyce put it quickly into the hole, then firmly dabbed on the turf and descended the ladder in triumph, without wound or scar.

We thought we had bagged all the hornets, so we left them "stewing in their own juice." Next morning early I went to the elm on the lawn and the lime in the orchard, and there were my hornets, as thick and as busy as ever, going and coming over the barn as if nothing had happened! I started off for the island as fast as I could go, and there I saw a notice up, "*Business carried on as usual during the alterations.*"

I am quite of opinion that they had already commenced building another nest in an adjoining rotten old pollard more inaccessible than this one, for it had partly fallen, and its head hung over the very middle of the water. Here I could see bits of fresh *débris* constantly dropping into the water—a sure proof that the builders were at work laying the foundation of a new nest.

There were scores of hornets buzzing about the tree—they were evidently puzzled ; one came straight at me, but only to give me a parting malediction. When he was within a yard of my nose he turned suddenly away and flew over the barn to tell his friends on the lime tree of the terrible disaster that had befallen the castle.

No doubt those that were at home when Joyce stormed the fortress had been suffocated ; but my impression is that many of the insects carried on business in the lime tree all night, or were away on some marauding expedition elsewhere, or they may have been friendly neighbours come over to condole with, or mourn over their murdered relations.

I was obliged to leave for town the same morning ; but Joyce has vowed that he will have that hornets' nest if he has to fell the tree.

I have since learned that the enthusiastic Joyce got up the next morning at four o'clock to take the nest, when he found the tree on fire. The long drought had rendered the rotten interior dry and inflammable. It must have been inwardly burning or smouldering all the day after I left, and the following night ; the nest was, of course, quite destroyed. The hornets are still as thick as ever round the trees in the garden and orchard.

Joyce discovered another nest high up in an ash tree in the park. At this he laboured from nine o'clock at night till half-past one in the morning. He triumphed at last, and sent the nest to me in a box next day. On unpacking it, I found that it contained several revived hornets. Before examining it more closely, I sent box and all to cook in an oven.

Now, at last, I have the nest before me ; but alas ! it is browned and charred. It has been baking too long, so that it is difficult to discover what it is made of. My judgment, however, must be in favour of "decayed wood" rather than "the bark of trees." It contains three circular tiers of cells, the lowest being three and a half inches in diameter, the second four inches, and the

upper four inches. These three circular tables are firmly held together, but half an inch apart, by a double central stem. The cells are full of grubs—now partly cooked. They were all alive and wriggling uneasily when I first opened the box. The tiers must have been originally surrounded by a thick encasement of the same material, forming an almost circular ball, but part of this has been broken away. Joyce promises to send me a more perfect nest next time.



